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MODERN DRAMA

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Editor

A. C. EDWARDS

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MODERN DRAMA

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Foreword

Those of us who have been tipling too steadily from the heady wine of presentism will be somewhat sobered by M. Duvignaud's review of the Paris stage in this issue. For it is sobering to learn that what we had thought was vanguard is now already becoming rear guard. Ionesco and Beckett, we are told, are no longer new. And we were just beginning to get caught up on them!

But if what our reviewer says is true, those playwrights who will take the place of the old avant-garde, Adamov, Schéhadé, and Gascar, have merits not possessed by their predecessors. They have for one thing, lucidity, and for another, wider vision.

For the first, lucidity, we must rejoice. It had begun to appear that modern drama was beginning to accept the same dreary fate which had overtaken much of modern poetry, and to a lesser degree, modern fiction. Unlike the latter two forms, drama, with few exceptions, has continued to accept the responsibility of making itself understood. It is still dependent on the box office. And this is true even in university theatres. Directors of university theatres accept the fact that drama is a social art, that an audience is part of any play and that part of their responsibility is making the play clear to the audience. Recently some of us were beginning to regret what seemed to be a growing fashion in drama—the fashion of being misunderstood.

But good omens are appearing. In addition to the changing theatre in Paris, Brecht is becoming increasingly popular. And anyone who has read or seen "The Good Woman of Setzuan" or "The Caucasian Chalk Circle," those "parables of the theatre" (Bentley's phrase), must be astonished at the manner in which the simple and lucid are combined with the profound.

Holdings in Modern Drama

The December number of *Modern Drama* will carry a description of the O'Hegarty Collection at the Watson Library, University of Kansas. Among other items this collection contains material on the Abbey Theater and a number of unpublished letters by Yeats.

If there are other notable collections which touch on the drama since Ibsen, *Modern Drama* will be glad to hear of them.

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AN APPROACH TO TRAGEDY

II

ASPECTS OF THE TRAGIC VEIN

We have not been able to discuss the raw materials of tragedy without implicit consideration of the tragic vein. Now, however, we are in a position formally to take note of matters of first importance. What has been derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* will be obvious; so too, that which has come from a study of works of literature that have long been called tragedies. But not even the writer himself can tell how much has been gathered from materials not immediately associated with the subject.

Patently a discussion like this should be expository, not prescriptive. As we all know, artists are not bound by the dicta of their fellow artists or those of critics and scholars; they create their work in response to the urgency of their cerebrational powers and experience, and according to the character of their rhythmic grasp. This does not mean that an artist has absolute license, for if his work is to be considered seriously it must have some essential relationship with other products of artistic enterprise. More narrowly, if an artist insists that his drama is a tragedy, the work must have something essential in common with all other tragedies. It is this common area with which we are presently concerned.

The Term "Tragedy." We should not begin a study like this without agreeing as to the limits of the key word. In general language usage the term "tragedy" is variously employed to describe events and circumstances that are characterized by suffering, unhappiness, and death, both in the plane of natural occurrence and the plane of factitious occurrence. In our discussion, however, we shall use the word "tragedy" solely to label a particular class of factitious occurrences which appear in some narrative works of literature. For us a tragedy is a kind of rhythmized verbal expression in a plane of nonfact; in other words, it is a work of art.

Setting. The tragic action must have an acceptable basis; that is, certain elements of the environment must make possible both the values and the conflict. In a drama the stage setting represents a factitious physical environment; the utterances and actions of the *dramatis personae* usually focus the attention on one or more of the social institutions; and, implicitly or explicitly, the entire work reflects the cultural atmosphere of the creative artist. The stage setting and the

institutional setting are inevitably qualified by the cultural atmosphere, but they may be deployed with some freedom according to the craft needs of the dramatist. It is the cultural setting, however, that is of prime importance, for it alone indicates the values by virtue of which the conflicts are engendered. If therefore a tragedy is to be composed, the writer must live and work in a favorable cultural atmosphere.

Before proceeding any further we should define the role of factitious occurrence in the general setting. In so far as this reflects natural occurrence, it should be clear that there can be no disorder in nature *qua* nature. There can be nothing but unending change. A colleague teaching students of anatomy was wont to assure his students that in any disagreement between textbook and cadaver, the latter was always right, for nature is always right in the sense that it is what it is without qualification. Moreover, as Emma von Ritoók tells us, "... Nature of and for itself . . . lies outside the realm of values."⁸ Moral conflicts and spiritual anguish are never in nature; hence a work of literature that endeavors to limit itself to a disinterested presentation of events reflecting natural occurrence automatically confines itself to a neutral report devoid of all human values. The plane of natural occurrence can be functional in a setting only when it is employed in combination with nonfact planes. This means that it is the cultural atmosphere that is the indispensable element in a work of tragedy.

Let us make another approach to the same idea. It is generally assumed that man lives in a real world, that is, a world so fixed and solid that it is substantially unaffected by ideas. But in this assumption we err by limiting man to a more or less molecular existence in the electrocosmos. When we call to mind the different planes of reference—occurrence, fact, nonfact—we realize that man is distinguished from all other creatures and things by the fact that his life is profoundly modified by his ideas. His very reports of nature, his investigations of the plane of occurrence, lead him to abandon instinct in favor of the part truths of his faulty knowledge. But even this is only a beginning; man also interprets the assumed facts that he has proclaimed and tries to direct life according to the interpretations. His existence is thus a decidedly mixed one, neither a state of nature nor a life of ideas. Indeed, we may say that man is caught between two gravitational pulls, the biological forces that would anchor him in the animal world, and the ideational forces that would make him something more than molecules and protoplasm. The two opposing groups of forces determine the fluid, complex environment in which a man lives; and the particular character of this fluid, complex environment determines whether or not a cultural atmosphere is favorable to tragedy.

8. "Kunst und Wirklichkeit," *Magyar Női Szemle, A Szellemi Pályán Muködő Nők Lapja* (May-June, 1935), p. 131.

In the fifth century before Christ the cultural atmosphere of the Greeks made tragic poetry possible. "Tragedy," says Edith Hamilton, "was a Greek creation because in Greece thought was free."⁹ The free mind, we know, is indispensable to the recognition of options and the exercising of choice; it is, indeed, the prime element of individuality. The Greeks had a culture that made tragedy possible because a significant group of Greeks, albeit a small minority, had transcended human feralism and had not stopped at socialization. They were not mere animals, semisocial creatures, or social automata; they were men who could think for themselves, decide for themselves, and also act for themselves. Because these men were individuals, they developed a culture that was not monolithic in the sense that it was one-valued, but so variegated that different sets of values could receive adequate consideration and recognition. Whereas a monolithic culture tends to reject all conflicts of interest because it is intolerant of the forces that create opposition, the culture of the Greeks stimulated them, for with individuality each one moves in the direction of autonomy.

We must remind ourselves that most gifts have an obverse and a reverse, and the gift of individuality is no exception. The obverse brings the promise of a significant life. One has an awareness of himself and his environment such that he no longer remains a blind victim of natural circumstances, nor does he remain a wholly unimportant and therefore completely dispensable fragment of a social mass. He senses the opportunity to master life, to have dominion over himself and his environment; he feels himself endowed with the power of a creator. He grows big with strength and a sense of importance. Sooner or later, however, he is reminded of the reverse side of the gift. He learns that, regardless of the new world that he seems to have created, he is still an animal, that to a great extent he must continue to live like one, and that he will surely die like one. He finds himself caught in social ways and develops suspicions that he may be closer to the status of social automaton than he had previously thought possible. He realizes that the choices of the individual are always qualified by animal responses and social expediency, and that they invariably lead him into areas of conflict. He finally comprehends that in his struggles to assure himself success in the attainment of material or spiritual values, he can never enjoy more than a partial and temporary triumph. In the long run, the reverse erases the obverse, for "it is appointed unto men once to die."

But this is *not* all. Once a man has an awareness of himself as an individual he can never again recapture biological or social anonymity; he can never again lose himself in the flesh or in the mass of a society. Having discovered himself as an entity, he has also discovered that he is fundamentally alone. He has thereafter the fearful burden of respon-

9. *The Greek Way* (New York, 1942), p. 228. See also Chapter I, "Freedom," in Miss Hamilton's *The Echo of Greece* (New York, 1957).

sibility for what he is and what he does. He is tempted to flee from life, but cannot do so; he knows that he cannot master life, but he feels that he has no other alternative but to struggle for mastery as long as he lives. Individuality thus becomes in itself the personification of conflict.

In the fifth century B. C. some such grasp of individuality was attained by the Greeks. The mechanistic concepts of Democritus came too late to have any effect on the tragic poets; thus scientific determinism could not blot out the concept of the individual with his freedom of choice and action. By and large, we may say that the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles certainly reflect a cultural atmosphere of freedom and responsibility. In this cultural atmosphere individuals make choices, and when those choices are unwise the individuals suffer dire consequences. Eventually all individuals err in their choices, because the world in which human freedom manifests itself is finally unanalyzable and unpredictable. The freedom is thus only partial and the vision is always clouded. In such a world it is inevitable that all men sooner or later stumble and fall.

Whether or not it is possible, it would seem undesirable to separate the cultural atmosphere from the thought of a play, in this instance, the tragic perspective. Aristotle tells us that most important of all in tragedy is the plot, the pattern of action, and the same idea is echoed in Goethe's utterance, "*Im Anfang war die Tat!*" But Aristotle and Goethe assumed the cultural atmosphere in which they lived and wrote, something that we should no longer do. Behind the tragedy must be a perspective which assumes freedom with the capacity to observe, to choose, and to act for oneself. It is because of this capacity that the individual becomes responsible for his utterances and his deeds.

Responsibility would not be disturbing if the gifts of freedom were automatically accompanied by human well being. The tragic perspective, however, always implies intense suffering. The apostle may cry out, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" But his eyes are not focussed on this world. The tragic poet is concerned first of all with this world where death stings, where the grave is victorious. Death is irrevocable; the life that has been lived is unalterable; freedom and responsibility are finally buried in the grave. As long as there is life there is some hope that the balance between well being and suffering may be tipped in favor of the former. But when Iphigenia is dead, when Antigone is dead, when Duncan is dead, when Desdemona is dead, or when anybody is dead, it is too late to attempt to recover the balance. In the tragic perspective of the Greek poets, the gift of freedom is marred by man's imperfection, his incapacity to use the gift without harming himself and others. The combination of

freedom and imperfection brings about choices and actions which occasion intense suffering and disaster.

We may now reasonably assume that cultural settings in tragedy are basically like that in which the Greek tragic poets lived and wrote. The cultural setting in which a Roswitha wrote, on the other hand, produced little dramas in which characters suffered and died without tragic implications. The German nun, like any genuine religious, viewed life solely in the perspective of otherworldliness; the suffering in this world thus added to one's profit in the next and was to be cultivated rather than avoided.¹⁰ So too Pierre Corneille's *Polyeucte* fails to capture the tragic view. When Felix orders Polyeucte executed and says that the Armenian is going to his death, the victim, steadily affirming his Christianity, declares that he is going not to death but to life. His wife Pauline likewise asks for death, saying, "My husband calls me to his happier land." Shakespearean tragedy, however, is like that of the Greeks; it emphasizes individual choice and frustration in the endeavor to secure well being. Whether the *dramatis personae* act deliberately or impetuously, they aim at the good life now, not in some otherworldly hereafter. Even such innocents as Romeo and Juliet do not fulfil themselves in death; they are frustrated.

To repeat in brief: the setting must provide a cultural atmosphere in which tragedy is possible. Fundamentally this means freedom which develops and is developed by individuals.

Dramatis Personae. As we have already noted, the tragic poet depicts factitious human beings who make choices within the limits of their knowledge and act in an attempt to have some dominion over themselves. Aristotle thought that such *dramatis personae* were usually associated with the old families of tradition and myth, and the literature of tragedy has, until the last century or so, generally agreed with him. It should not be difficult for us to understand why such figures were chosen. We need but remember that relatively few people in the past were deemed free and hence capable of exercising options. Many human beings were slaves who had their lives shaped for them by their owners. Many others were laborers, mechanics, and businessmen whose preoccupation with survival and money-making activities left them no opportunity to consider options by means of which they could give direction to their own lives. Relatively few men were free, and these were symbolized by the old families of tradition and myth. They alone were engaged in conflicts having moral significance. Because they reflected human beings, these factitious persons of the older tragedy were always imperfect, and in their battles with evil they were eventually betrayed by their own flaws.

10. The attitude is like that of Jacopone da Todi in his poem "Praise of Diseases." See *Lyric Poetry of the Italian Renaissance*, collected by L. R. Lind (New Haven, 1954), pp. 60-65.

Even in 1958 the human race is not free from slavery. Moreover, laborers are often brutalized by their work, and the majority of human beings, whether engaged in crafts or in professions, are preoccupied with money-making activities. As a result, most people are imitative in their thinking; they do not recognize significant options and thus are in no position to make important decisions and to act on them. By sheer force, which was unconcealed, the slave or workman of earlier years was compelled to accept a pattern of life according to his social status. Many of the old forces are still active, but today they are often concealed. The illusion of freedom is now common in some countries, but the fact is that many of the people in those countries are caught in the routines of a patterned existence.

During the last century and a half, the tragic poets have had a difficult time developing *dramatis personae*. The new social gospel has preached that every man is equal to every other man: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." At the same time, however, science adopted determinism, which permits freedom to none. For a time, the poets were tempted by naturalism, but they eventually observed that science not only eliminates free will but it also eliminates everything that cannot be described as a natural occurrence. For the most part, modern poets have joined the attack on the social distinctions between wellborn and baseborn; they have taken for granted that a human being may attain significance as an individual regardless of his social position. In other words, a man even at the lowest economic level of society may affirm his freedom, make choices, and act on his own responsibility. In the twentieth century, tragic potentiality is more likely to be determined by what is in a man's mind than by the social standing of his parents and his grandparents; hence the factitious persons of modern drama may be rich or poor, mechanics or statesmen, but they will always make choices, act on their decisions, and in some measure give direction to their own lives. Such *dramatis personae* are thus much like the tragic figures of the past; they are those who stand out from the masses by virtue of exceptional qualities of will and of action.

Situational Complex. Of the different categories of forces used in narrative forms of literature—physical, biological, social, divine, egoic—all may be functional in tragedy, but the egoic is indispensable.¹¹ The physical and biological forces reflect the plane of natural occurrence and assumed fact which is based on natural occurrence; the other forces reflect planes of factitious occurrence, assumed fact, and nonfact. Now it would seem obvious that a conflict between two natural forces could in itself be of no significance to tragedy. The river

11. See my essay, "The Analysis of Literary Situation," *PMLA* LI (1936), pp. 872-889.

flowing into the sea, and the tide flowing into the same river are in themselves meaningless to literature. So too, a man's life as a continuum of undisturbed routine activities offers no conflict of the directing forces. Or, if everything were completely determined and contained by the plane of natural occurrence, it would not be possible for factitious occurrence and nonfact to arise, and thus tragedy could not emerge. We must recognize that factitious occurrence and nonfact are the means by which man gives significance to his own existence and to his surroundings, and tragedy is always a response to such significance. When the egoic force gives rise to free will and thereby makes possible the recognition of options, the making of decisions, and the translation of decisions into deeds, a man becomes something more than a natural force. He is no longer compliant and conforming; he resists being pushed and pulled hither and yon, and he objects to being expanded or contracted because of the forces in his environment. He by no means enjoys complete success in his resistance to pressures and his positive efforts to control his own life, but even a slight success means that he is creating his own humanity. He becomes an artist, almost a theandric being. No matter how limited his freedom, how few his capacities, and how inadequate his craft, he nevertheless fashions in part himself and his environment. In so doing, he gives direction to his own destiny and becomes potential material for tragedy.

Although the egoic force is indispensable and the tragic figure must have options and make decisions, we realize that there can be no operation in a kind of vacuum. Indeed, the egoic force needs certain kinds of opposing forces in order to develop tragic potentialities. For example, there is little if anything that is tragic in the suicide of a person who has come to the realization that he may choose to live or to die, and then kills himself. In literature we are concerned with the motives of suicides, and we cannot be satisfied with the knowledge that a man discovers he has options in the same way that a baby discovers it has ears. In other words, the situational complex is just what the phrase itself implies—an involvement of a variety of forces, sometimes many from the same general class, through which a conflict of interest develops. An individual of tragic possibilities commits suicide not because he has found out that he is able to do the deed but for some reason that has been developed through factitious occurrence, assumed fact, or nonfact. A man takes his life because he thinks that he cannot live without certain values: health, liberty, honor, love, dignity, or something the like.

The situational complex is of great importance not only because it generates the plot but also because it shapes it. Without a conflict of interest, the status quo is maintained. While there may be activity—bodily movements and utterances—nothing of narrative significance happens; the natural continuum prevails. But as soon as a decision is

made and the decision is translated into action, something happens, for the established order of things is threatened. If the decision is important and the ensuing action of great consequence, a battle begins to take shape with a rush of forces to both sides. The action that occurs because of the struggle becomes an embryonic plot.

Plot. As we know, plot is not just the outline of a story; it is the pattern of a given action. In tragedy the plot may be a pattern embracing exposition, complication, development, crisis or lysis, and resolution, and the action may progress horizontally or vertically. In his *Greek Tragedy*¹² H. D. F. Kitto describes the Aeschylean pattern as vertical and intensive for a play like *Agamemnon*. By way of contrast we may refer to Shakespearean tragedy as horizontal and extensive, taking a dramatic figure at a certain time and place, moving him through a series of events, and disposing of him at a decidedly later time and often in a different place.

Whether the plot is to be described as intensive or extensive, or possibly both, it reveals the tragic figure in a framework of action that necessarily leads to suffering. Irrevocable choices and irreparable deeds bring inescapable consequences. Often enough the tragic figure makes a decision that gives a specific direction to the action; that is, through his own option he becomes inextricably involved in a series of events. At the point of choice, usually the complication, the tragic figure's determination to act leads him sooner or later into the deed that cannot be undone. The development continues until a given action works itself out in consequences. Eventually the tragic character recognizes the circumstances in which he is involved and the direction that he has taken; he becomes aware of the significance of his choice and action. But he also realizes that the situation is irretrievable; it is too late for him to employ effective counter measures. He cannot erase and begin again, for he cannot undo the past. He has made his choice, he has translated that choice into action, and he himself is caught by the forces that he has unleashed. The climax brings the certainty of poignant suffering and perhaps even death. The closing of the drama, the resolution, balances the irreparable deed with the penalty, the dire consequences visited upon the tragic character.

The plot must have unity. The decision and the actions of the tragic figure always upset the status quo, which is comparable to an established order; as a result chaos threatens or reigns. If the tragedy is to end with a satisfactory adjustment of circumstances and figures, the action must come full circle: order, disorder, and order again. When the penalty is exacted, the disorder should disappear with its maker. But if the choice and action reveal that men in their ignorance, weakness, and confusion seek to create order in a human world that cannot be set aright except through violence and intense suffering, then the

12. (Garden City, N. Y., 1955).

new order comes into being when the tragic hero takes up his undesirable burden. The cultural world in which an Orestes lives, for example, is put aright only by an awful decision followed by a tremendous deed.

Language. We must consider at least two aspects of language in relation to tragedy: first, the qualities that make it possible for an artist to create tragedy; second, the artistic expressions in poetry and prose that are appropriate for the tragic vein. While these two are very closely related, they do need separate consideration.

A language is a repository of human experience. It is, however, not something static, for it is both an instrument and a product of its own instrumentality. It is the means by which the biopsychosocial manifestations of a particular people are given symbolic form.

Each language differs from the others in qualities and potentialities more or less peculiar to itself; that is, in its capacity to grasp and express experience, and also in its fluidity. A functioning language always gives form to experience which has not yet attained form; in doing so, the language modifies experience because it separates from a biopsychosocial continuum that which is essentially inseparable. Moreover, in giving form to experience language alters itself. Language thus operates in planes of assumed fact and nonfact, although it originates in the latter.

In view of our discussion thus far it should be obvious that every language is not suitable for tragedy even as every people with a language of its own has not had the experiences that make tragedy possible.¹³ First of all, tragedy cannot appear among a people unaware of individuality. A people that has attained a social status with the cultural atmosphere necessarily reflecting both the animal man and the social creature, but nothing more, has no raw materials for tragedy. Tribe against tribe or nation against nation will create conflicts and occasion intense suffering, but until a human being transcends the social status by gaining awareness of himself as a unique individual capable of giving some direction to his own life, tragedy is unthinkable. Second, if individuality is essential, it follows that there must be concurrently an experience of freedom. A people socially welded into something that approximates a totalitarian unity will have no regard for the life and happiness of separate persons, for the destiny of the single person is identified with the destiny of the group. As a result there is no possibility of tragedy. Only we who have had such experiences that our language has made tragedy possible can contemplate the single person and assign him significance. Indeed, by virtue of our language we can also create figures of speech which assign the qualities of tragedy to national and tribal disasters. Third are the special

13. This brings up the problem of translation. It may be possible for us to translate words from one language into another, but we cannot successfully recreate plays like *Hamlet* and *King Lear* in a language which lacks the experiential background which provides the raw materials for tragedy.

values attendant on individuality and freedom. Values are found in "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and these become rights which are theoretically accorded everyone. The special values give dignity to each person, and all human life becomes precious. As a consequence, the well being of each man, woman, and child is the concern of the entire group.¹⁴ From these values we arrive at a fourth factor, responsibility. With individuality, freedom, and special values, the concept of responsibility is signally altered. It is no longer a matter of complete group domination so that the salvation of the single person is a product of his compliance with and conformity to approved social patterns; rather, the group becomes more and more responsible for the physical safety and general well being of the individual at the same time that the latter becomes increasingly responsible for his own moral and spiritual well being.¹⁵

A language cannot give form to that which a people has not experienced. It stands to reason, then, that tragedy can appear only among those people whose experiences have required their languages to give expression to individuality, freedom, values, and responsibility. The Greeks of the fifth century B. C. were gaining such experiences; so they developed the requisite forms in their language, and their artists created tragedy. The Elizabethan English likewise gained comparable experiences with similar results.¹⁶

The second aspect of language, the expressions that are peculiarly artistic and those that are appropriate for tragedy cannot be discussed adequately in this essay. The artistic phase is too involved even to be broached, but we must at least touch upon that which is appropriate for tragedy. If we establish very general classes of literary veins as (1) serious, (2) light, and (3) mixed, it would seem clear that tragedy, concerned as it is with individual destinies, and hence with suffering and with death, should be assigned to the first class. This means that the artist must have a positive concern and sympathy for the tragic figure, and he must also endeavor to elicit an empathic reaction from the experiencing agent. Moreover, since that which is superficial or ephemeral is always in danger of becoming dated and thus also ridiculous, it should follow that the language appropriate to tragedy should possess an essential seriousness and dignity. Only such speech can adequately give expression to the most important values of a culture.

The Experiencing Agent. Actually the reader and the theater-goer have nothing to do with tragedy as an art form; they are not found

14. Note the reversal of Hitlerian slogans like "Nicht du aber dein Volk" and "Du bist Nichts, dein Volk Alles!"

15. I use the word "spiritual" in contrast to "physical." More specifically, we may say that the physical is definitely related to the plane of occurrence; the spiritual, however, can arise only from planes of nonfact.

16. When we view these two, we are tempted to believe that the language of tragedy takes form first at the crossroad of experience when a people retain their habits developed in preliterate social groups at the same time that the minds of at least a strong minority have been individually liberated. It is difficult to read early English poems like *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* without thinking that, centuries before the appearance of Shakespeare, the cultural atmosphere and the language were gaining the raw materials needed for the writing of tragedy.

between the covers of the book. Whether a tragedy will or will not effect a catharsis of emotions or restore to order a chaotic nonfact world cannot, we suspect, be decided in advance for every human being. Yet tragedy may be distinguished from comedy by reference to the experiencing agent. Comedy keeps the experiencing agent at such a distance that a conflict is seen in perspective as a mismatch that cannot be taken with unqualified seriousness, whereas tragedy is so composed that it is empathic. Thus the reader and the theater-goer test the skill of the tragic poet. If he is successful in creating tragedy, the experiencing agents throughout the years will respond empathically to his work.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY

In any attempt to define tragedy we should first question ourselves regarding expectations. Certainly we do not expect to arrive at an exact mathematical formula by means of which we can accurately test a work of literature, nor can we hope to have devices comparable to the blueprints of a mechanical draftsman. Formulas, blueprints, prescriptions, and recipes are all used to indicate how we may proceed in the mass testing or the mass production of articles. These guides are indispensable to industrial plants, laboratories, and kitchens, but they apply exclusively to relatively stable materials which may be shaped into fairly standard forms. Tragedy, we scarcely need remind ourselves, is not manufactured; it is created. Moreover, it is wholly unrelated to the products of industrial assembly lines, for every tragedy is a unique work of art. Our problem is therefore much more difficult than that of devising formulas and making blueprints, inasmuch as we have to determine what is common to a multitude of creations, each one of which is unique. The kind of definition we have to make strongly affects the probability of success; fortunately it also modifies the kind of responsibilities assumed by those who make the venture.

It has already been made clear that a favorable cultural atmosphere is essential to tragedy. *Ex nihilo nihil fit* is true of all enterprises, including the artistic; so the biopsychosocial experiences of a people must provide the raw materials of tragedy even as they provide the raw materials for all human thought and utterance. The artist creates his work out of these raw materials, not apart from them, and his effective deployment of the materials is always limited by the capacity of the experiencing agents.

The cultural atmosphere determines the language of a people. Experiences thus can be deployed by a dramatic artist because language has already given them some form. The task of the artist is to make the form significant. He must put into rhythmized speech that which has already been conceived but hitherto inadequately expressed both as regards the agonizing steps of the tragic experience and the crushing

totality. The language to express such experiences is dominantly sober and dignified, for it gives form to the complex thought which embodies the values of a people.

The general thought in tragedy is related to the struggle for human significance in the face both of the tragic figure's manifest inadequacies and of the terrifying power of the forces that oppose him. Man as an individual is free to make some decisions and to act on them, but once he has moved he cannot return and begin again as though the first step had never been taken. A decision cannot be recalled and obliterated; a deed cannot be cancelled. The freedom which man has is thus always a limited one. As an individual he is able to initiate some actions, but he is not capable of forecasting all the consequences and thus is never in a position to exercise sufficient control over himself and his surroundings to guarantee that he can reach his goal and there make himself secure. He is in a favorable position for releasing certain forces because he can think for himself, decide for himself, and act for himself, but he has neither the wisdom nor the power fully to control the forces once he has released them.

Regardless of the kind of *dramatis personae* employed in a tragedy—human or divine—the struggle always reflects human difficulties, with man never equal to all the circumstances in which he finds himself. The very essence of tragedy carries in it the thought of at least a major defeat of the prime figure, no matter how noble his intentions, how valiant his struggles. According to the tragic poet, the life of sensation-consciousness is something that man cannot endeavor to put in order without blundering and thus also not without enduring pain, suffering, sacrifice, and disaster. That is to say, life is for the most part too much for man. In the efforts to succeed, whether he is seeking material supremacy or spiritual, a man at some point errs and suffers defeat.

While tragedy reveals the miracle of individuality, it also exposes the ironic consequence of the gift, the Icarian plunge into the abyss. Hence life is not only wondrous but also terrifying, for in this world of imperfect human beings every man has flaws, the opposing forces invariably possess superior power, and suffering is unavoidable. Even the best of men are thus always on the brink of disaster. Yet, though the odds are apparently always against man, the tragic poet does not abandon him to terror and overwhelming evil, for the artist is not a nihilist. He insists that, despite the ruin of the most outstanding individuals, there is beauty and goodness in men. Moreover, he declares that, despite defeat and destruction, there is something magnificent in the attempt of the tragic individual to master himself and his surroundings.

In closing, we may say that tragedy is defined by its particular kind of cultural atmosphere, its language, its *dramatis personae*, its situational complex, and its plot. Invariably the tragic poet portrays a con-

flict in values of great moment, and the conflict results in dire consequences. These consequences are visited upon individuals who have made unwise decisions and have acted upon them, and thereby have loosed more forces than they have been able to control. Again, as a work of art a tragedy is a compositional unit; hence it does not close without re-establishing order in its upset world. Finally, though tragedy admits the essential inadequacy and decisive defeat of men, it also acclaims the unsubdued spirit of humankind.¹⁷

17. See also two of my articles published in *Scandinavian Studies*: "Strindberg's 'The Father' as Tragedy," XXVII (1955), pp. 45-63; "Strindberg and Naturalistic Tragedy," XXX (1958), pp. 1-18.

CARL E. W. L. DAHLSTRÖM

NOTICE

Dr. E. C. Hill of Miami University is writing a book on *Bernard Shaw and America*. He will be grateful to correspond with readers of this magazine who have material pertinent to his research. He should be addressed at P. O. Box 188, Oxford, Ohio.

THE THEME OF LONELINESS IN THE PLAYS OF SYNGE

In the famous preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* in which Synge renounces the reality of Ibsen and Zola with its "joyless and pallid words" in favor of a reality clothed in language which is "rich and living," he makes clear the basis of his whole art—conception and language alike—in reality imaginatively conceived. The "rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality" is what he wants his plays to communicate. In describing the folk imagination in Ireland, he describes his own: an imagination that is "fiery and magnificent, and tender."

Synge's pronouncement comes with the more force as an introduction to the *Playboy* because of its extravagant gusto and its laughing perception of human weakness, so hotly and bitterly resented as a satire on Irish life. For in this play, "superb and wild" as it is in its humor, we see the same combination of fiery magnificence and tenderness which marks all Synge's work from the early, faultlessly perfected little one-act play, *Riders to the Sea* to *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, the tremendously conceived collection of stirring scenes which his death kept him from bringing into a finally integrated artistic whole.

With all the joy and richness in Synge's perception of human life, there is mingled his tender awareness of the pitifulness of our human condition, which he always conceives in terms of loneliness. The theme of loneliness pervades his dramas. It is there in the very desolateness of the settings which help to create the feeling. It causes the actual sufferings which make the plots. It is the symbol of suffering in which the characters express their sense of human sadness. And finally, the voicing of its music so infuses the dialogue that the plays become almost a poem of loneliness.

I.

The statement of the scenes as we read: "An Island off the West of Ireland" or "Some lonely mountainous district," releases our imaginations for what pictures of desolation we will. The effect is the same if we see on the stage the "Country public-house or shebeen, very rough and untidy" in which Pegeen Mike, "a wild-looking but fine girl, of about twenty, is writing at table." When we see Nora Burke uneasy in her cottage, we know it is "The last cottage at the head of a long glen," before she says "and I a lone woman with no house near me." The settings through which Deirdre moves are as remote from human habi-

tation. Even when she comes back to her death to the high seats of Emain, she is put in an outer tent, "a shabby, ragged place . . . with frayed rugs and skins . . . eaten by the moths" and is left desolate, separated first from Ainnle and Ardan and finally from Naisi.

II.

The measure of her suffering is the loneliness, "the hardness of death," which has come between her and Naisi, not her own dying. Indeed, all of Synge's plots evolve out of the struggle to assuage the immeasurable loneliness of the spirit. The beauty of the action with its terror and pity grows almost solely from this. Synge's characters are as innocent of an Aristotelian tragic flaw dramatically conceived as they are full of the flecks and flaws of human weakness poetically imagined. What leads them to suffering and to death is neither the *hamartia* of the Sophoclean hero nor the confusion of Galsworthy's victims of social forces. It is their longing for human companionship, for some other being to enter into theirs and help them break down the isolation into which they were born.

The conception of loneliness as a source of plot grows as the characters who suffer grow in complexity. Maurya's desolation in *Riders to the Sea* is the perfectly simple, uncomplicated anguish of the mother whose sons are taken from her. She knows her doom in advance: "He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world." She comes to stand for all mothers of all time who are robbed of their sons by the sea; and part of her power as a character is her power as a symbol. The plot of the play is simply the fulfillment of her foreknowledge of disaster.

Nora Burke, the heroine of *In the Shadow of the Glen*, Synge's other one-act play, is conceived wholly in terms of loneliness; and it is from her struggles against this loneliness that the plot emerges. In her conversation with the tramp which opens the play, Nora, the young wife, reveals the whole essence of her life and what has led to her old husband's hatred of her: "God spare Darcy, he'd always look in here and he passing up or passing down, and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while, . . . and then I got happy again—if it's ever happy we are, stranger, for I got used to being lonesome." When Michael later tells her she was no fool to have married the old man who lies listening, feigning death, she says: "I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Michael Dara, for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain." After Dan, the old husband, has

sneezed and risen from his shroud to cast her out to the hard life of the roads, the tramp offers her the "herons crying out over the black lakes . . . and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm" to ease the hardship of the life she must share with him; and as she makes her final speech, we feel that she has found some measure of companionship in the imagination of the tramp: ". . . but you've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go," then turning to Dan, "You think it's a grand thing you're after doing with your letting on to be dead, but what is it at all? What way would a woman live in a lonesome place the like of this place, and she not making a talk with the men passing? And what way will yourself live from this day, with none to care for you? What is it you'll have now but a black life, Daniel Burke, and it's not long I'm telling you, till you'll be lying again under that sheet, and you dead surely."

In the two-act play, *The Tinker's Wedding*, it is longing for respectability, an end to her separation from respectable folk, that makes Sarah, the young tinker's wench, so ardently desire marriage. She wins Michael's consent to the wedding by threatening to leave him "lonesome and cold." It is loneliness pure and simple, the fear of being left alone, that makes old Mary wreck Sarah's fine plans: "Where is it you're going? Let you walk back here, and not be leaving me lonesome when the night is fine," she cries piteously. And when they do leave her, she cannot bear her solitude; under its compulsion she steals the can with which Mary has planned to pay the priest, steals it in order to get a "good drop" of comfort, saying ". . . maybe if I keep near the peelers to-morrow for the first bit of the fair, herself won't strike me at all; and if she does itself, what's a little stroke on your head beside sitting lonesome on a fine night, hearing the dogs barking, and the bats squeaking, and you saying over, it's a short while only till you die."

In Synge's first three-act play, *The Well of the Saints*, the treatment of loneliness is tremendously heightened and complicated by being mingled with the portrayal of blindness and illusion. Martin and Mary Dou, the poor blind beggars, leave the loneliness of the world of the blind, only to be thrown back upon it by their disenchantment with the world of the seeing. In the third act when Martin is blind again, he realizes his need of Mary: "It's lonesome I'll be from this day, and if living people is a bad lot, yet Mary Dou, herself, and she a dirty wrinkled-looking hag, was better maybe to be sitting along with than no one at all. I'll be getting my death now, I'm thinking, sitting alone in the cold air, hearing the night coming, and the black birds flying round in the briars crying to themselves, the time you'll hear one cart getting off a long way in the east, and another cart getting off a long way in the west, and a dog barking maybe, and a little wind turning the sticks. . . . I'll be destroyed sitting alone and losing my senses this

time the way I'm after losing my sight, for it'd make any person afear'd to be sitting up hearing the sound of his breath and the noise of his feet, when it's a power of queer things do be stirring, little sticks breaking, and the grass moving—(*Mary Dougl half sighs, and he turns on her in horror*)—till you'd take your dying oath on sun and moon a thing was breathing on the stones." When he learns who is there, his relief at recovering Mary is so great that he kicks the miracle working holy water out of the hand of the priest who has come to restore sight to the blind a second time. What he and Mary have recaptured is the companionship of their dreams of beauty, a fine beard for him and beautiful hair for her. What they have learned in the world of the seeing is the degree of their own isolation from it. The seeing "is a queer lot" and cruel; and "sight's a queer thing for upsetting a man." They are glad to see only dreams again. But they must have the companionship of each other to make the dreams possible.

Loneliness as the motivation of the action and basis of the plot is perhaps most poignantly presented in the *Playboy*, for all its gusty humor and reckless abandon. Pegeen Mike is like a younger Nora Burke conceived more in the round and more fully realized as a character. She needs as much as Nora does a fine man to be talking to; but she has no Patch Darcy. The best companionship her countryside can give her is that of poor Shawn Keogh, a cringing lout of a small farmer. When the play opens, she is toying with the idea of marrying him almost out of sheer contempt. She voices her own loneliness and boredom in saying teasingly to him: "It's a wonder, Shaneen, the Holy Father'd be taking notice of the likes of you; for if I was him I wouldn't bother with this place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulran-nies were driven from California and they lost in their wits. We're a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred seat." Besides this enveloping emptiness of any companionship to satisfy the vitality of her nature, Pegeen feels also a simple dread of solitude, a dread almost as childlike and elemental as that of old Mary in *The Tinker's Wedding*. She blames her father for going to Kate Cassidy's wake, "leaving [me] lonesome on the scruff of the hill. Isn't it long the nights are now, Shawn Keogh, to be leaving a poor girl with her own self counting the hours to the dawn of day?" She becomes almost plaintive as she continues to talk of the way Michael is "leaving her lonesome in the shop."

No wonder she falls in love with the picture her imagination makes of Christy, just as he does with his own romancing. For Christy, the best of his new role is that it gives him a place in the world of men: "Well, this'd be a fine place to be my whole life talking out with swearing Christians, in place of my old dogs and cat." The word lonesome echoes through his lovemaking. The wonder and glory of Pegeen's

love for him is that it keeps him from being "a lonesome fellow will be looking out on women and girls the way the needy fallen spirits do be looking on the Lord."

The bitter disillusion of Christy's repudiation of the world that has received him for the duration of his lie, he could not make more forcible than he does by saying that such company is worse than loneliness: "Shut your yelling, for if you're after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome, it's worse maybe to go mixing with the fools of the earth."

There could hardly be sharper anguish than there is in Pegeen's cry which closes the play after the violence with which she has driven Christy off: "Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World." She is bewailing her loss not just of Christy as a person, but of all the release of her own spirit which had found itself in him and now is driven into a more desolate loneliness than ever, for we know without her pushing him off that she can never go back to the miserable Shawn.

When Synge comes to deal with love on a wholly different plane in the ancient tragedy of *Deirdre*, part of the freshness which he brings to the old materials comes from the action's being propelled throughout by the emotion of loneliness. Naisi leads *Deirdre* to declare her love for him by saying: "Yet it should be a lonesome thing to be in this place and you born for great company." She knows that in him she has "the best company in the whole world" and that "It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only." She is leaving loneliness gladly. Yet the awe she feels at the doom that she knows must inhere in the very fulfillment of her love is expressed in terms of loneliness as she says: "And yet I'm in dread leaving this place, where I have lived always. Won't I be lonesome and I thinking on the little hill beyond, and the apple-trees do be budding in the spring-time by the post of the door? . . . Won't I be in great dread to bring you to destruction, Naisi, and you so happy and young?" In *Deirdre*, it seems to me Synge gives his subtlest portrayal of loneliness, for he makes the sense of it suffuse her very ecstasy. She tells Lavar-cham: "It's lonesome this place, having happiness like ours, till I'm asking each day will this day match yesterday, and will to-morrow take a good place beside the same day in the year that's gone, and wondering all times is it a game worth playing, living on until you're dried and old, and our joy is gone for ever." In a moment of sheer terror she begs Naisi, "Do not leave me broken and alone." But she is aware that the real loneliness is already upon them. She says to him: "there's nothing lonesome like a love is watching out the time most lovers do be sleeping." In this insight into loneliness at the very heart of passion, Synge

seems to me to have come to his final awareness of the quality of pain of spirit when

... in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.

Deirdre's sense of loneliness is intensified by Naisi's mourning in her behalf: "... it's a hard and bitter thing leaving the earth, and a worse and harder thing leaving yourself alone and desolate to be making lamentation on its face always," he says to her. Conchubar, who has treacherously brought the young lovers back to death because of his own yearning for Deirdre makes a refrain of loneliness in his pitiful complaints of being "old and desolate." He speaks of his "dun stretching east and west without a comrade and [he] more needy, maybe, than the thieves of Meath." He pleads with Deirdre saying: "There's one sorrow has no end surely—that's being old and lonesome." The three are bound together, linked in loneliness. Deirdre makes for Synge the ultimate comment on them all: "I'll say so near that grave we seem three lonesome people."

Thus in each play of Synge's the plot is controlled by loneliness. In some of them the characters move from loneliness to loneliness; and these are the ones which seem the most tragic. The action in the *Playboy* and *Deirdre*, which comes from the struggle against loneliness, pushes the characters into a greater loneliness. The deep longing of the human spirit to be united with another spirit goes finally unappeased.

III.

Not only do the actual sufferings which constitute the plot grow out of loneliness in Synge's plays; but the characters conceive suffering in terms of loneliness. It is their regular symbol for human woe. Christy says in describing his wretched lot before his transformation: "It's a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the lights shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog noising before you and a dog noising behind, or drawn to the cities where you'd hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty, hungry stomach failing from your heart." The cowardly Shawn expresses his terror in terms of loneliness: "... he'll be having my life, and I going home lonesome in the darkness of the night." When Martin Doull wants to be as cruel as possible to Mary, he says: "Go on now to be seeking a lonesome place where the earth can hide you away." The wild Owen of *Deirdre* gives us the feeling that his madness is sheer loneliness: "It's a poor thing to be so lonesome you'd squeeze kisses on a cur dog's nose."

Loneliness is the symbol for general as well as for particular suffering. The identification is very broad in the conversation between

Deirdre and Naisi's brothers before the return to Emain. She says: "... it's a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always." Ainnle's answer is: "There is no place but will be lonesome to us from this out." The idea that they must suffer now, Ainnle inevitably expresses by saying that they must be lonely. When Fergus criticizes Deirdre for betraying her suffering, his terms are: "It is a poor thing to see a queen so lonesome and afraid." Christy, in his joy of loving Pegeen, identifies unhappiness itself with the opposite of his state of companionship as he says: "I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair." It seems to be the whole fact of suffering in all human life that Deirdre is summarizing when she says: "There are lonesome days and bad nights in this place like another." Examples of the use of loneliness as a constant metaphor for the essence of suffering itself so crowd the speeches of Synge's characters that it is hard to choose among them.

IV.

This symbolizing through loneliness is an indication of Synge's treating the theme with a poet's imagination. He gives it also a poet's expression. He declares in the preface to the *Playboy* that "In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple." Some of the most full flavored of the speeches in his plays concern loneliness, as the passages quoted in other connections have abundantly revealed. Synge is constantly making a direct appeal to the imagination through the expression of loneliness. Part of our poetic sense of the region in the *Playboy* comes from its being referred to as the "lonesome west." "Bravery's a treasure in a lonesome place," says Jimmy Farrell. We receive a curious imaginative effect from the strange juxtaposition of terms in "a loud lonesome snore." Christy's "I was lonesome all times, and born lonesome, I'm thinking, as the moon of dawn," has both the language and the movement of poetry.

In the preface to *The Tinker's Wedding* Synge declares: "The drama is made serious—in the French sense of the word—not by the degree in which it is taken up with problems that are serious in themselves, but by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live." In his revelation in the dramas of the poetic meaning of loneliness in human life, Synge gives us the nourishment on which our imaginations live. With all their rich humor (and it is in fact of humor as nourishment of the imagination that he is speaking in the preface to *The Tinker's Wedding*) they are serious in the highest degree.

ELLEN DOUGLASS LEYBURN

CHEKHOV'S COMIC SPIRIT AND THE CHERRY ORCHARD

All wisdom is mournful. Therefore the wise love the Comic Muse. Their own high food would kill them. You shall find poets, rare philosophers, night after night on the broad grin before a row of yellow lights and mouthing masks. Why? Because all's dark at home. The stage is the pastime of great minds.

—Chapter VI, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*

I

"ALL'S DARK AT HOME"—for young Anton Chekhov. The son of a grocer, he watched the store after school. His father taught him to use his finger in weighing merchandise, and he beat him for trifles. Later, his father lost his store and his money. When Anton was a student of medicine in Moscow, his mother did not let the boy study: she came to his room with questions and comments, the questions being about laundry and dinner and the comments about the necessity for study. When Anton begged to be allowed to prepare for his exam, his mother cried. By his twenties, Anton was the breadwinner of the family. His sister Masha helped in the house, his older brother Alexei took to drink, his younger brother Michael went to school and his father Pavel sat around. . . . Anton was powerful enough to warn his parents not to tell lies, ineffectually of course. He knew that for ordinary people lying and self-deception come easily. He knew that he must purge his soul of deception.

To his publisher Suvorin, Chekhov described his growth toward honesty, telling of a young man reared in a world of lies: ". . . could you write a story of how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself drop by drop, and how, on waking up one morning, he feels that the blood coursing through his veins is real blood, not the blood of a slave?" After his purgation, Chekhov told his brother Alexander, "I myself am afraid of nothing."

Anton Chekhov was born in 1860 and died in 1904. On December 3, 1886, he wrote to Mme. Kiselyov: "In Russia there are two unattainable heights: Mount Elborus and myself." Later he told her: "I am getting as popular as Nana." With this success, Chekhov gave advice to his older brother. In his most famous letter, Chekhov, combining comic examples with serious thought, called Alexander ill-bred. The man of "culture," the good man, adheres to the following conditions.

He has respect for man, never creating a rumpus about a lost hammer or a lost eraser, never saying to a man with whom he is living, "It's impossible to live with you." He forgives noise, cold, overdone meat, caustic remarks, and the presence of outsiders in the home. He not only feels compassion for beggars and cats but also respects other people's property, and so he pays his debts—a wise crack against Alexander. He does not humble himself in order to arouse sympathy and to be made a fuss of, not saying, "Nobody understands me" or "I've wasted all my efforts." Developing an aesthetic taste, he does not fall asleep in his clothes; he cannot stand a crack in the wall with bedbugs in it, or breathe foul air, or walk across a floor that has been spit on, or eat straight off a kerosene stove. The "cultured" man strives to restrain and ennoble the sexual instinct, not requiring in a woman only physical relief or a mind that expresses itself in the ability to prevaricate tirelessly, but rather requiring freshness, charm, human feelings, the ability to be not a bitch but a mother (the Tolstoyan motif). Knowing that he is not a swine, he does not guzzle his vodka nor sniff at cupboards. This scheme of culture is followed by the Soviet Union, which continues to call a man *nikultyarni*, uncultured, who wears his hat indoors. For Chekhov, this scheme was a moral code by which the will was strengthened, the letters of Anton Chekhov revealing the growth of the mind and the morality which animate his stories and plays.

In the ordinary, mundane, and unheroic life about him, Chekhov found material for short stories which made Russians laugh. After the success of the stories, he turned to the theater. The doctrine of common sense in art that animated the stories, Chekhov applied to his drama. Once he wrote to his uncle Mitrofan, "People must never be humiliated—that is the main thing." His respect for ordinary human life gave pathos to the comic people he described. Like many observers of trivia, Chekhov found in small details the microcosm of matters of great importance, as in the sound of a harp string breaking, and in other bits of *mise-en-scène*. Once he offered to write a story about an ash tray for Suvorin. His heroes are everyday people in whom Chekhov discovers greatness of mind. His main concern lies in the reproduction of everyday action, thought, and feeling. From his training in science, Chekhov learned to be impartial, dispassionate, and curious about everything.

Desiring to see things clearly and knowing that "it is essential in this world to be indifferent," he embraced naturalism and defended art which is unpretentious:

Reference to Turgenev and Tolstoy—who avoided the muck heap—does not throw light on the question. Their fastidiousness does not prove anything; why, before them there was a generation

of writers who regarded as dirty not only accounts of "the dregs and the scum," but even descriptions.

Endorsing objectivity, Chekhov said, "A writer must soil his imagination with the dirt of life."

Chekhov's letters reveal his artistic creed—a scientific method and a distaste for pretension. His goal was the achievement of the role of free artist, which required, as he noted in 1899, a non-political role:

I am not a Liberal, not a Conservative. . . . I should have liked to have been a free artist, and nothing more—and I regret that God has not given me the strength to be one.

Hating hypocrisy and lying in all their forms, finding Pharisaism, stupidity and despotism "not among merchants only but also in science, in literature, and in the younger generation," he thought Dostoevsky's use of big themes indiscreet, saying several times that he is over-pretentious. Paul Bouget's work, the liberal rage in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Chekhov condemned as "a pretentious crusade against materialism." Although he was not strictly anti-religious, he stressed humanistic values: "My holy of holies," he wrote, "is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, love." He was against armies, in favor of Dreyfus and Zola, and a lover of *Anna Karenina* ("my darling Anna"). He said that Ibsen cannot write a play and asked for tickets to the *Pillars of Society* because "you know Ibsen is my favorite writer." He was capable of revising judgments:

I read Mrs. Beecher Stowe a long time ago and read her again six months ago with a scientific aim, and afterwards I experienced the unpleasant sensation mortals experience when they have eaten too many raisins and currants.

His subject matter may have been like Mrs. Stowe's, but his treatment of the commonplace was comic, evoking what Meredith called "thoughtful laughter." Unlike the melodramatist or the tragedian, Chekhov wrote about the indefinite, the momentary, and the contemporaneous. His opinions were not steadfast, but changed with circumstances, and as a comic artist Chekhov was the pin-pricker of pretension, the man who cures by mockery. The comic artist is a part of the commonalty, but if he is great, he is able to justify and to dignify it.

Writing a story in a room apart, Chekhov hears his sister speak to him from another room where she is ironing.

"Anton," she says. "I think I should like to go on the stage."

No answer. Marie keeps ironing. Anton calls to her in a few minutes. "Masha!" he sings out in his baritone voice. "Take mama with you."

"Where?"

"On the stage."

The comic idiom of his drama takes its roots in such scenes from life.

II

In 1900, with four years left before tuberculosis claimed him, Anton Chekhov married the actress Olga Knipper; and he was often away from her, recovering at Yalta while she was in Moscow. Always keeping his honest eye on the small detail, he told his wife not to put letters in parcels. He wanted her near him, but he must first get well. He needed her, he wrote, to cut the fingernails of his right hand. He longed to scratch her back. He complained about the bores who visited him, and he wrote detailed accounts of his bowel movements. He was pleased when the Yalta grocer had a new brand of marmalade—as good as Moscow offered. When his wife wrote that she was depressed, that she felt her acting was not good, he consoled her in this way: don't be depressed, you are a great actress, did I tell you that the new shampoo lathers well? Just as he juxtaposes the serious and the small in *The Cherry Orchard*, so he does in letters and conversations. His plays are reproductions of his own experience and of his own kind of talk. The same abrupt transitions between thoughts of the letters become comic in *The Cherry Orchard*. The linguistic unity of his letters and plays shows where scrupulous honesty led him. His life and his art were one.

From 1901, when Chekhov wrote that he was "tempted to write a farce" until 1903 when he wrote that he had completed "a comedy almost a farce," Chekhov worked out *The Cherry Orchard*. He told his wife that he had written a comic part for her [Varya "the perfect fool"] and also for Stanislavsky [Lopahin]. In the original production Stanislavsky chose to play Gaev and Olga Knipper played Mme. Ranevsky. Chekhov joked that he had at last written a play in which there is no pistol shot. On September 26, 1903, he announced that his play was finished. He told Mme. Stanislavsky, "It has turned out not a drama, but a comedy, in parts a farce indeed, and I am afraid I shall catch it from Vladimir Ivanitch [his impresario, Danchenko]."

And he caught it! Danchenko and Stanislavsky felt the tragedy of the play and responded to its gloom. The idea of farce gave way to the idea of a tragedy of attrition. The notion that a set of characters is set free from restrictions upon their lives, the hold of the past, was not recognized. The atmosphere seemed to be melancholy. Since Chekhov died shortly after the production of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1904, critical attitudes toward the play assumed the irony of the grave: it seemed as if this last comedy, written in sickness, contained a tragic view of life.

The Russian way of being melancholy is often funny. Lyubov rants about Trofimov's lack of a mistress and insults Trofimov by calling him names. Then she says, "Come back, you silly boy, I was only joking." This mixture of two emotions, one serious, one comic, leads

to pathos at times, just as Chekhov's consolation to his despairing wife, followed by the gag about the shampoo's lathering well, has something of pathos in it. This anomaly of high feeling and gag is the comic spirit that Nietzsche admired when he said, "I would give all my life for the Russian way of being melancholy."

Chekhov intended *The Cherry Orchard* as a group of vaudeville sketches in which each character performs his bit comically and self-consciously. The general disaster of an era's passing is a tragic overtone. Unhappily, the stage history of *The Cherry Orchard*, from Chekhov's day to our own, has insisted upon the tragedy of Lyubov and Gaev, the representatives of an aristocracy whom the "vital" bourgeoisie will replace. John Gassner calls the play a "tragedy of attrition" because, "Instead of showing people eventfully destroyed, Chekhov generally represented them as being eroded . . . rusting away in disuse, eventlessly stalemated or permanently dislocated." Many critics show amazement because the Moscow Art Theater presented the play in 1917, immediately before the Revolution. For them, the play represents the passing away of the monarchy and its traditions, victory belonging to the anti-aristocrats who are fighting a class war. It is true that Chekhov, though neither a reactionary nor a liberal by habit, does pit class against class throughout the play. Yet his reason for these conflicts of class is, as Louis Kronenberger says in *The Republic of Letters*, to show the virtues of all classes.

In taking the view that *The Cherry Orchard* is a tragedy, critics misunderstand the humor which Chekhov intended and the comic spirit with which he looks upon man's life. Charlotte, the governess, like a vaudevillian, performs tricks of magic and ventriloquism. Trofimov ends a scene which threatens to be serious with a pratfall. When Lyubov anxiously awaits news of the disposition of the orchard, she displaces her grief by attacking Trofimov, the perpetual student:

LYUBOV: (*Getting angry, but speaking with restraint*) You're twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, but you're still a schoolboy.

TROFIMOV: Possibly.

LYUBOV: You should be a man at your age! You should understand what love means! And you ought to fall in love! (*Angrily*) Yes, yes, and it's not purity in you, you're simply a prude, a comic fool, a freak.

TROFIMOV: (*In horror*) The things she's saying!

LYUBOV: I am above love! You're not above love, but simply as our Firs here says, "You're a good-for-nothing." At your age not to have a mistress!

TROFIMOV: (*In horror*) This is awful! The things she is saying! (*Goes rapidly into the larger room clutching his head*) This is awful! I can't stand it! I'm going. (*Goes off, but at once returns*) All is over between us! (*Goes off into the ante-room*)

LYUBOV: (*Shouts after him*) Petya! Wait a minute! You funny

creature! I was joking! Petya! (*There is a sound of somebody running quickly downstairs and falling with a crash. Anya and Varya scream, but there is a sound of laughter at once.*)

LYUBOV: What has happened?

(*Anya runs in*)

ANYA: (*Laughing*) Petya's fallen downstairs!

(*Runs out*)

LYUBOV: What a queer fellow that Petya is!

(*The STATION MASTER stands in the middle of the larger room and reads THE MAGDALENE, by Alexey Tolstoy. They listen to him but before he has recited many lines strains of a waltz are heard from the ante-room and the reading is broken off. All dance. TROFIMOV, ANYA, VARYA and LYUBOV come in from the ante-room.*)

LYUBOV: Come, Petya—come, pure heart! I beg your pardon. Let's have a dance! (*Dances with Petya*)

The scene ends in laughter and in dancing. The comedy of the scene is reinforced by a reading of Alexey Tolstoy's *Magdalene* which breaks off before the waltz. Lyubov feels that the loss of the orchard is due to her private sin in Paris. She is like the *Magdalene*, but Chekhov pooh-poohs her retributive god with a dance.

Each of the characters in *The Cherry Orchard* has greater vitality than the residents of the summer cottages who will replace him. Epikhodov's two-and-twenty misfortunes are the frustrations of schemes unfulfilled. Yet Epikhodov hatches new plans which have new opportunities to be undone. His creaking boots, one of his misfortunes, is a source of vaudeville comedy. Like Malvolio, he is the upstart, a counting house clerk who refuses to know his place. How much kinder Chekhov is to him than Shakespeare is to Malvolio! Varya attacks his intrusiveness in using Gaev's billiard table, but he goes unpunished. Pishtchick, the poor landowner, borrows money throughout the play; he alone ends up rich, repaying loans to departing aristocrats. This is comic irony.

The others end up poor in only one sense: they have lost the orchard. Each, however, goes on to a new life. Lyubov goes to Paris, Gaev will work in a bank, Varya as a housekeeper, Anya goes to an aunt, and Lopahin, the new owner of the orchard, returns to his projects in Harkov. Nobody dies, no great loss is sustained—the orchard is to be sold at the beginning of the play. It is difficult for the residents of the estate to fall asleep at the beginning of the play; after the orchard is sold, Lyubov at last gets a good night's rest. The passing of an age must not be tragic: it is a human condition that men of good sense recognize, grow old with, and surrender to when they die.

Like Charlie Chaplin, Chekhov began his work with farce and developed it into high seriousness. Eric Bentley in *The Playwright as Thinker* calls *The Cherry Orchard* a *drame*, and Chaplin calls his

movie *Limelight* a "human drama." When the pathos inherent in farce—consider the broken ribs of the man who has slipped on a banana skin—becomes so important that the audience moves beyond laughter and when what has made us laugh becomes serious, a reversed reaction takes place for the spectator: the joke turns sour. Thus Chekhov may attempt to write a "gay" play, a group of vaudeville sketches, and through inordinate skill may achieve pathos.

III

The use of billiard language in *The Cherry Orchard* is one of the means Chekhov uses to develop the character Gaev so that our laughter at him develops into sympathy with him. A grown-up child of fifty-one, Gaev loves to suck caramels. His pleasure in life is billiards whose language he eventually applies to life. Others in the play know him for his billiard idioms. "How does it go?" Lyubov asks. "Let me remember. Cannon off the red." Gaev is delighted that she remembers. "That's it," he says. When he acts sentimentally about a bookcase, intoning a hymn—"Hail to thee who for more than a hundred years hast served the pure and good"—and when Lyubov, already bored with him, says "You're just the same as ever Leonid," he covers up for his sentimentality with the exclamation, "Cannon off the right into the pocket!" When Firs calls him to bed, he shoots an imaginary ball into an imaginary pocket and calls the shot a beauty. How spoiled a child of fifty-one he seems! As he recites a hymn to nature, Trofimov interrupts him, saying ironically, "You'd much better be cannoning off the red." Nervous because Lyubov has given gold to a wayfarer and because Varya has reproached her, saying, "The servants have nothing to eat," Gaev says inconsequentially, "It's a long time since I played a game of billiards." The catastrophe of the sale of the orchard is brought home forcefully to him when he sees that the servants have taken over his billiard table. Yet he forgets about them, recovering quickly from grief and joking in the false gaiety of the last act about his new job in a bank by calling himself a financier. Like the "bookcase" and the "O nature!" exhortations, Gaev's leave-taking speech is interrupted: his nieces supplicate, "Uncle!" and "Uncle, you mustn't!" Then Gaev says *dejectedly*, "Cannon and into the pocket, I'll be quiet."

The quiet humor of this allusion to billiards grows to pathos when Gaev uses billiard language for the last time. Knowing that Trofimov's dirty galoshes, hidden during Charlotte's conjuring trick, have finally been found and that the group will leave the orchard forever, Gaev uses billiard language in a passionate metaphor that communicates his despair:

TROFIMOV: (*putting on his galoshes*) Let us go, friends.

GAEV: (*greatly agitated, afraid of weeping*) The train—the station! Double baulk, ah!

Gaev is thinking about his grief to come. The railway station and the train appear before his mind's eye, and he compares them to the baulk lines on a billiard table. We can laugh at every reference to billiards except this one to baulk lines. At this point the laugh catches in our throats, and pathos possesses us. The use of the language of billiards to identify the emotions of a character is an example of the movement from farce to pathos, from vaudeville to "thoughtful laughter," throughout the play. The phrase "good-for-nothing" undergoes a similar career. We can agree laughingly when Firs calls Trofimov, Epikhodov, and the servants "good-for-nothing." But when the tired, faithful old servant is left alone in the house, he uses the phrase against himself. Then we cannot laugh.

In a possibly ideal production of *The Cherry Orchard*, the actors play for farce. In addition to the comedy of line evoked by billiard language and by the phrase "good-for-nothing," Chekhov uses comedy of situation presented in the manner of a burlesque skit. In the following scene, Firs is like the maladroit Abbot and Gaev becomes a reluctant straight-man Costello. Hence the significance of the second stage direction—*A Pause*:

(All sit plunged in thought. Perfect stillness. The only thing audible is the muttering of Firs. Suddenly there is a sound in the distance, as it were from the sky—the sound of a breaking harp string, mournfully dying away.)

LYUBOV: What's that?

LOPAHIN: I don't know. Somewhere far away a bucket fallen and broken in the pits. But somewhere very far away.

GAEV: It might be a bird of some sort—such as a heron.

TROFIMOV: Or an owl.

LYUBOV: (*shudders*) I don't know why, but it's horrid. (*A pause*)

FIRS: It was the same before the calamity—the owl hooted and the samovar hissed all the time.

GAEV: Before what calamity?

FIRS: Before the emancipation. (*A pause*)

Apart from the suitably varied, private reactions of each character to this cosmic omen of the sale of the orchard, and apart from the poetry of realism which Francis Ferguson notes for this scene in *The Idea of a Theater*, this gag is of first importance. A serf's view that the freeing of the serfs was a calamity is so startling that it stops all conversation. The emancipation had taken place forty-three years before the action of the play; it is as if an American Negro should seriously bemoan the Emancipation Proclamation as a calamity. This wonderful gag has the rhythms of a skit in a burlesque show, Gaev playing top banana. The second pause is for the general astonishment before Gaev changes the subject: "Come my friends," he says, "evening is falling."

By enlarging the area of life to which he applied farce, Chekhov reached the point where it became a source of pathos. As a young clown, Chekhov, like Chaplin, wore the mask of an old man, performing cartwheels and scratching a bald head. He was funny early.

Is this growth of farce a change of form? The words *drame* and *tragedy* seem to be misapplications to *The Cherry Orchard*. The pathos which comes from farce is still the comic view of life and belongs in the view of reality called comedy. Dramatic form can grow from melodrama to tragedy; both these forms look at reality with intensity and belong to the same species. There is no growth from farce to tragedy, as Mr. Gassner's classification implies; nor does Mr. Bentley's classification *drame* use the development which Chekhov saw in his own work when he called *The Cherry Orchard* a comedy. The monologue called *A Moscow Hamlet* is a funny vaudeville skit whose hero is a prototype for Gaev. The actor who plays Gaev must deliver his lines as gags; he must play for laughs, even to the words "The train—the station! Double baulk, ah!" The pathos will take care of itself.

If we call *The Cherry Orchard* a drama, we must do it with the development from farce in mind. Then we recognize that the pathos takes its origin in farce. It is important that Chekhov's ending bears out the comic view of reality.

At the end of *The Cherry Orchard*, the main characters are set free from the past. Each goes off in isolation. They have all learned how to live better, abandoning a non-productive, dead society which glories in its past. They go away to do and to produce. For the comic spirit the means justify themselves: to live in the shadow of past glory is to divorce yourself from the vital. They will live from day to day, these lovers of the good life, and they go to a beginning.

Chekhov's comic spirit shows itself through the dispassion with which he lets them go away, leaving *Firs* behind. He treats his characters scientifically, giving each the reaction which suits him. In general, after the sale, most of them feel relief. They abandon aristocratic pretensions of being better. As human beings they show courage in response to a seeming disaster. Chekhov's eternal reference is to the humanistic and the humanitarian. These people who leave the orchard fulfill the "point of life" as Chekhov described it to his brother, who feared family reaction to his civil marriage: "The whole point of life," Chekhov wrote, "consists in making a protest without asking for pity." We justify ourselves on earth, in the present moment, not in heaven nor in eternity. When asked why he liked church bells, Chekhov said, "That's all I have left of religion." He believed in the transitory, in the seizing of pleasure wherever you find it. "I love every kind of merrymaking," he said. He loved marmalade as Gaev loved caramels. His love of life took him to masked balls and to fêtes.

He saw a unity in mankind: each man was important—peasant, bourgeois, and aristocrat. Serious as he was about his writing, he was able to say, "I am bored to death with reading Chekhov."

The tragic writer is serious, viewing life *sub specie aeternitatis*. Chekhov's view of life is the opposite. His *A Moscow Hamlet* makes Shakespeare's hero a character in a vaudeville skit. *The Cherry Orchard* shows men as isolated, concerned with small pleasures, living for the moment, going to a new freedom in the present after a delay in an unproductive past, making small jokes at their own expense, being curious about everything in their future, and abandoning pretension. The means justify the means, not the end. *The Cherry Orchard* is anti-heroic and anti-tragic. Therefore it is a comedy, reflecting Chekhov's comic spirit.

NORMAN SILVERSTEIN

NOTICE

The Spring-Summer number of *English Fiction in Transition* (1880-1920), edited by Helmut E. Gerber, is available for distribution to those interested in the period. The contents of the Spring-Summer number include:

"Ford Maddox Ford: An Annotated Checklist of Writings About Him"

"Arnold Bennett through Biography"

"Arnold Bennett Manuscripts and Rare Books: A List of Holdings"

Inquiries should be addressed to the Editor, Department of English, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana.

TRUTH AND DRAMATIC MODE IN THE MODERN THEATER: CHEKHOV, PIRANDELLO, AND WILLIAMS

ANNOUNCING THE ARRIVAL OF THE PLAYERS at Elsinore, Polonius with glib facility and pride in his academic knowledge reels off the various dramatic kinds: "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral." Shakespeare is laughing at the pedants of his time and might find equally amusing the critics of modern drama who talk, Polonius-like, of realistic, naturalistic, symbolic, epic, expressionistic, mythic, and poetic drama. But the situations are different. Where Polonius' recitation of dramatic kinds is mere sterile pedantry, since the Elizabethans had settled on and were developing the latent possibilities of a dramatic mode which both transcended and comprehended the school-book categories, the modern critic is forced to use and even multiply such clumsy and relatively imprecise terms as "naturalism" and "expressionism" because the modern dramatists have been unable to find a satisfactory dramatic mode. The various dramatic "isms" are not in this case the inventions of dry academicians trying to reduce living works of art to a system which can be taught without effort in the classroom, but of critics trying desperately to describe and understand the restless, uneasy search for a dramatic mode which has characterized the theater of the past hundred years. A few brief illustrations will have to serve here.

Ibsen began as a writer of poetic drama and then turned to writing realistic plays. But by the end of his career in an attempt to express his ideas, he had created a type of play in which the realistic framework remained, but the life of the work was in symbols, e.g. *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*. Strindberg's fluctuations were even more violent. He began by writing extremely naturalistic plays such as *The Father* and *Miss Julie*, then wrote equally extremely expressionistic plays such as *A Dream Play* and *To Damascus*, and then returned once more to naturalism. In recent years this search for mode appears most clearly in the plays of Tennessee Williams where symbolism and realism are always juxtaposed. And Williams after writing a predominantly realistic play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, turned to a radically expressionistic mode in *Camino Real*. Very few modern playwrights have followed to the end the mode in which they began to work. One need think only of the plays of Hauptmann, Gorki, Piran-

dello, Lorca, Eliot, O'Neill, Kaiser, Brecht, and Sartre to realize that the individual author's search for a suitable mode is the history of modern drama as well. No sooner does one dramatic mode become established than a radically different kind appears, or several various kinds are yoked together in a new attempt to express adequately the modern world. This dramaturgical instability has inevitably been reflected in the allied theatrical arts. In acting the range is from Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theater on one hand to the tradition of the Abbey Theater, where actors were sometimes rehearsed in a barrel in order to make them into mere voices for poetry; the names David Belasco and Gordon Craig suggest the extent to which theories of scene design have varied; and in the construction of physical theaters we shift back and forth between the proscenium-arch stage of the realistic theater, neo-Elizabethan platform stages, and theater-in-the-round.

This persistent and violent fluctuation in mode has not been confined to the modern theater, or even to modern literature. Concentrating on the visual arts, André Malraux in his *The Twilight of the Absolute* traces in detail the disintegration in the West over the past hundred years of any belief in "absolute form," i.e. a settled mode, and the appearance of a sensibility which responds to a variety of forms as diversified as a primitive fetish and a painting of Watteau. As a result of this broadening of sensibility the visual arts themselves reveal the same confusion of "forms" which is so typical of the modern theater. It is, according to Malraux, the loss of any belief in an "absolute" to which form gives expression that has resulted in the present situation: "But each form of the sacrosanct was regarded by those belonging to the civilization that gave rise to it, as a delineation of the truth; thus, for Byzantine men, the majesty of the Byzantine style was not the expression of a mere hypothesis. To us, however, these forms appeal only as forms. . . ."

Why this endless experimentation and search for mode should be such an integral part of modern drama, and modern life, is a problem which has interested the playwright as much as the critic, but the playwrights have usually explored their quandary in their plays rather than in discursive writing. Nearly every serious modern play is concerned indirectly with this problem of mode, but there are a number of plays which deal with it explicitly, and I propose here to look at three plays of this kind. The first two, Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* and Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, make it clear that the problems of the dramatist as well as those of ordinary men are under discussion by employing theatrical symbols. The third play, Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*, does not refer to the theater, but presents characters with clashing perspectives which are identical with the principal perspectives, or modes, of the modern theater. The conflict and

its resolution dramatize very clearly Mr. Williams' own struggle with dramatic form.

The Sea Gull, like most of Chekhov's plays, has very little plot. A number of middle-class Russians who no longer believe very strongly in anything are assembled at the country house of the old counselor, Sorin. His sister, the famous actress Arcadina, is here with her lover, the well-known writer Trigorin, and her neglected son, Constantin Trepleff, who is trying to be a writer. Nina, the young daughter of a neighbor, is loved by Trepleff. Around these major figures Chekhov groups a number of minor ones: the doctor Dorn, the steward Shamreyeff, his wife Pauline, his daughter Masha, and the schoolmaster Medvedenko. In the usual Chekhovian way these characters merely sit around and talk, each isolated in himself from the others. Tension is maintained, however, by the use of the love-game-comedy technique. Arcadina loves Trigorin who is attracted to Nina who loves him. But she is loved by Trepleff, who is loved by Masha, who is loved by Medvedenko. The result is not comedy, of course, but the pathos of eternally unsatisfied love. Nina runs away with Trigorin and he subsequently abandons her. She returns sometime later to the country house, where the others are once again assembled, and tells Trepleff that she cannot love him even now. The play ends with Trepleff's suicide. This is the familiar world of Chekhov: spiritual emptiness, isolation, frustration, and lassitude culminating in a sharp and sudden terror.

The surface of the play has all the Chekhovian trademarks: the apparently disconnected and fragmentary happenings; the conversations which seem to have no focal point; the mysterious symbols, in this case the lake and the sea gull; the irrelevant lines which suddenly flash with meaning and reveal profound emotions; the slow but inevitable drift of events; the prevailing mood of sorrow balanced by a desperate gaiety and mocking self-irony. Chekhov takes us down through this eddying existence to the very sources of its movement by means of a most subtle device. Each character has a theory of drama, some idea about what a play should be in order to reflect life truly. Each, therefore, believes that the type of play he espouses is "realistic," and each one *acts*, though without knowledge that he is doing so, as if life itself were his particular kind of play. The majority of the dramatic theories are as crude and straightforward as the characters who hold them.

For Medvedenko, the schoolmaster, trying to live and raise a large number of dependents on a miserable salary the only reality is that of economic struggle, and so he wants a play with a social message. "You know, somebody ought to put in a play, and then act on the stage, how we poor schoolmasters live. It's a hard, hard life." Shamreyeff, the overseer, is interested only in comic opera and farce, and in life he is a buffoon whose character is as simple as those of low comedy. His only

distinguishing trait is that he never allows anyone to use the horses of the estate. Sorin, the old civil servant who has lived an ineffectual existence in which he has merely done what society expected of him, wants a story called "The Man Who Wanted To." Dorn, the doctor, wants some variety of the "idea" play. "A work of art should express a great idea." And he wants clarity, "In a work of art there must be a clear, definite idea." In life Dorn is a "naturalist." He sees human existence as a precise and unalterable round of birth, copulation, and death, and so he refuses to prescribe medicines for the sick Sorin because by "naturalistic" standards Sorin has lived his allotted span. The mechanism has run down.

Arcadina is an actress of the Duse-Bernhardt variety; students cover the stage with flowers for her, and she goes from one great starring role to another in such plays as *Camille* and *The Fumes of Life*. While she is not the type to hold any theoretic ideas on dramatic form, the parts she has played, her reading tastes (she can recite Nekrasov but dislikes de Maupassant), and her distaste for other theories of drama establish her as what we should call a "romantic," though the plays of Dumas fils were thought shockingly realistic in their time. In life Arcadina sees herself as a great belle, a tragic heroine, noble and self-sacrificing, giving herself to the man she loves without regard for conventions, and therefore for her *Camille* is a "realistic" play. Life is to her eyes a series of Second-Empire drawing rooms and beautiful death scenes where nobly suffering souls hide their pain under exquisite manners. To maintain this illusion she commits the cruelest acts, for the fact is that she has a most unattractive twenty-five year old son. To admit this son to her life would be to destroy her stage since the heroine of *Camille* has no place for a shoddy, unhappy, graceless young son who would make it painfully evident that she is forty-three. So Arcadina keeps the young man in the country, allows him no education or money, and gives him, instead of love and understanding, high-romantic scenes of denunciation and passionate forgiveness.

Trigorin, with whom Arcadina imagines she is artistically in sympathy, holds quite different theories. He is the "realist" of the play. In the midst of any situation in which strong emotions are at work in others, he will withdraw to the position of a detached observer and jot down bits and pieces: that a sea gull has been killed, that a cloud is shaped like a piano, that a girl tortured by a hopeless love takes snuff and drinks vodka. After Arcadina has literally torn a passion to tatters in the high-romantic fashion trying to persuade Trigorin to remain with her, he steps aside to write observations in his notebook. Trigorin is a writer of the "outside," of the surface of things, who will always seem only "charming and clever." He recognizes his own weakness as a writer and admits that he is only "a landscape painter." Young Trepieff characterizes his writing perfectly, "Trigorin has worked out his

own method [for describing a moonlit night], it's easy for him. With him a broken bottle neck lying on the dam glitters in the moonlight and the millwheel casts a black shadow—and there before you is the moonlit night." Trigorin, the objective painter of whatever *is*, lives a life as charming and clever as his works and as devoid of feeling. He is incapable of sympathy, understanding, love. Just as he withdraws to record the shape of a cloud in his notebook, so when he is presented with someone who loves him, Arcadina or the girl Nina, he simply jots down their reactions and goes on to destroy them without the slightest sympathy. The only feelings he is concerned with are his own, for these are the only feelings that the thoroughgoing "realist" can certify as genuine. Other people must remain for him simply objects which stimulate his senses and give rise to certain feelings in him. Trigorin is kind and well-meaning but isolated by his own objectivity which has its source in self-centeredness. It is this which vitiates his writing and condemns him forever to hear his latest book described as "charming and clever," but "nothing like Tolstoy."

If Trigorin, the realistic writer, suffers the death of objectivity, Trep-
leff, the symbolist, suffers equally from too much subjectivity. He senses something in the world which has nothing to do with the surface of things; for him there is a mystery underlying reality for which he can find no adequate objective correlative. The moonlit night is not for him the glitter of a piece of glass and a shadow but "the shimmering light, and the silent twinkling of the stars, and the far-off sound of a piano dying away in the still, sweet-scented air." He turns all his scorn on the realistic theater. The "theater today is nothing but routine, convention. When the curtain goes up, and by artificial light in a room with three walls, these great geniuses, these priests of holy art, show how people eat, drink, make love, move about and wear their jackets; when they try to fish a moral out of these flat pictures and phrases, some sweet little bit anybody could understand and any fool take home; when in a thousand different dishes they serve me the same thing over and over . . . it's then I run."

In contrast to this realistic theater Trep-
leff writes and produces his own symbolist play for the others. The theater is out in the open moonlight. There are no characters in the normal sense, only symbols and spirits. The time is 200,000 years in the future when the world is crumbled to dust, and there is only "horror, horror, horror." This is, Trep-
leff explains, "not life as it is and not as it should be, but as it appears in my dreams." The play is certainly inept, probably ridiculous, the cry of an extravagant self-pitying creature who will not face up to the hard fact that art is always a compromise between what the author knows and what his techniques will allow him to present. But the reaction of the audience is one of self-satisfied cruelty. Since they all have their own ideas about what a play should be, they laugh, chat-

ter, discuss the crude stage effects, and finally Arcadina dismisses her son's play as "decadent." Trigorin's comment, "Everyone writes as he wants to or can," suggests both his complacency and his artistic relativism.

Trepleff's life accords with his play. He has been rejected by the material world, he is a failure, his mother despises him and will not have him around. Nina, the girl he loves, does not understand him and leaves him to run off with Trigorin. So he abandons the "surface world" and turns to his dreams which reveal great mysteries, though, of course, the dead world crumbled to dust which in his play is presented as a vision of the future is actually nothing more than a symbolic presentation of what the present is for Trepleff. His imagination cuts through the mother's Second-Empire world and Trigorin's world of *things* to a vision of the wasteland. The vision destroys him in the end and drives him to suicide. His sensitivity is so extreme that he can neither write a successful play nor live a life. Trigorin characterizes Trepleff's art—and his life—with accuracy, though without sympathy. "Something strange, vague, at times even like delicious raving. Not a single character that is alive."

Each character in the play sees his life as a play complete with sets, and himself as an actor whose lines and actions are dictated by his understanding of the mode of the play, realistic, naturalistic, romantic, symbolic, he is playing in. And, of course, the theory of drama each puts forward is the one which will mirror the "true" world as the character sees it. But the "plays" of each of these characters are inadequate, for the other characters are constantly stumbling on stage and spoiling the "scene." Dorn's flat, simple, naturalistic round of birth, copulation, and death, is threatened by old Sorin who feels that he has had no life at all, and though he has come to his naturalistic terminus he still wants to "live." In Dorn's terms Sorin has "lived," but Sorin insists he hasn't and wants medicines which will permit him to enjoy whatever it is that he has missed which he calls "living." Dorn, however, simply dismisses him as an actor who hasn't learned his part. Trepleff has only to call Arcadina, "mother," to destroy her scene; but she is stronger than he and in the end drives her son to suicide by denying the existence of his "theater" of feeling. Life is no wasteland for her but a round of passionate scenes, intrigues, and triumphs. Nina with her open, straightforward love offers a threat to the materialistic "play" which Trigorin lives in, but Trigorin saves his "play" by never being aware that an ingénue has wandered into it thinking it quite a different kind of play. He simply uses Nina for his own pleasure and then abandons her.

Is this world a spiritual wasteland which can only be expressed through Trepleff's symbolistic method which reveals the emptiness and horror of human existence? Or is it Trigorin's world of unrelated

objective facts: a sea gull is shot on the lake and a cloud is shaped like a piano? "Both, and more" is the answer Chekhov gives us. Each of the dramatic theories held by the characters is tenable, but the mistake lies in regarding any of the theories as absolute and mistaking any single drama of life for reality. To point this idea Chekhov uses the character of Nina. She begins as an ingénue whom Trepleff forces to play the symbolic part of the "soul of the world," which she doesn't understand, in his play. But she has no feeling for the role and becomes a romantic heroine who falls desperately in love with Trigorin and runs away with him. He abandons her, her child dies, and she becomes the major figure of a naturalistic play. She has experienced the variety of life and has seen that it contains many roles and many plays, and when she makes her last appearance Nina tells us that she is not a *sea gull*, i.e. simply a natural creature of the lake, but an *actress*, a person aware of playing only one of many possible roles before the impenetrable background of the lake.

What is true for the individual is true for the playwright. To adopt a single mode of expression would commit him to a single perspective and force him to deny the only reality which matters, the suffering, lost individuals who have adopted different perspectives to express their own sense of life and different roles which "star" themselves and allow them to exist. To write a naturalistic play would be to ridicule suffering human beings and deny them validity in the same way that Dorn ridicules Sorin, and Arcadina denies her son, Trepleff.

To avoid the limited single perspective Chekhov evolved a form which mixes a variety of modes. On the surface his plays resemble the work of Trigorin, a multitude of seemingly disconnected and trivial details. But Chekhov always uses these details to suggest not only the isolation of his characters from one another but the wells of powerful feelings lying beneath the surface of their pointless conversation. He mixes symbols—the sea gull, the breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard*—with his realistic details. He makes his characters subject to naturalistic forces, but he allows them the dignity of minds which refuse to be broken by these forces. Trepleff's play is described by Medvedenko as the result of Nina's and Trepleff's "longing to create some image which both can share and true to both." The play within the play is a failure, for Nina finds that it is not true to her, but Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* is an *image* which all can share and which is true to all because it focuses on what is common to all: suffering, isolation, and the desperate need to be understood and loved.

There is a passivity, a quietness, in the suffering which Chekhov's characters undergo as they seek and always fail to comprehend others in their "image" of life, and an indirectness and subtlety in the image with which Chekhov comprehends all of them. But in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the suffering, which has the same

source, is violent, direct, compulsive; and Pirandello's dramatic techniques are equally powerful and completely unorthodox. Here the problem of the dramatist and of the man trying to understand his life is reduced to a conflict between two modes, the realistic and the non-realistic. The story is simple: six Characters, who have been created by an author and then abandoned because he could do nothing with them, enter a theater where a company is rehearsing and demand that the manager of the company construct a play out of their story. Intrigued, he agrees to do so.

But *Six Characters* is not finally a simple play. It is woven of false leads which end up blind alleys, unreal realities, realities which are illusions, truths which are lies, and lies which are truths. The play has the effect of a "crazy-house" where the parts merely "multiply variety in a wilderness of mirrors," and the human image is endlessly and terribly distorted. But despite all its apparent confusion, the play is beautifully constructed, for the distorting mirror is in every instance the practical and "realistic" perspective.

We can see this if we forget for a moment the illusionary status of the six Characters. They are, very simply, six people who cannot agree about what has happened to them and who they are. Years before, the Mother left the Father, by whom she had had the Son, and lived with another man by whom she had three children, the Step-daughter, the Boy and the Child. The Father insists that he sent the Mother away out of kindness because she was unhappy with him. The Mother believes that he drove her away because he was tired of her. The Step-daughter maintains, however, that the Mother did abandon the Father and that she now denies it because she does not want to alienate the Son. The same kind of problem arises again when the Step-daughter and the Father argue about why he used to meet her at school and follow her home. The Father insists it was because he was interested in her welfare, but the Step-daughter takes a more cynical view. The play—as well as the play within the play—pivots on a similar situation; the near seduction of the Step-daughter by the Father in a bordello. The Step-daughter insists that this proves that the Father is no more than a lecher, but the Father argues that this is but one unfortunate event in an otherwise honorable life. The situation is further complicated by the Son, a most proper young man, who insists that *nothing* happened simply because he finds the whole affair upsetting and in bad taste. The Mother, who says very little because she is overcome with confusion and shame, spends most of her time weeping. The two younger children, too shy to speak, suffer in silence and wander aimlessly about the stage.

This is the "material" from which the author-manager must construct a play. Unfortunately, he is a realist and is insistent on arriving at a single objective "truth." His actors belong to the realistic school and

are outraged by any suggestion that when they play a part they are "acting." The pretensions of this group to rendering literal reality are quickly deflated in a number of ways. The actors are gross, inept, and highly stylized when they try to act out a scene which the Characters have just "lived" for them. The Step-daughter points out that the bordello contained a large yellow couch and that the color is important to the tone of the scene; but the theater property-room has only a green couch. When the Characters are acting out the seduction scene the author-manager insists that they speak up, but he is told that "these aren't matters which can be shouted at the top of one's voice."

But Pirandello is not interested in merely showing that Zola's *tranche de vie* is a theatrical impossibility. The realistic theater distorts life in a more serious and fundamental way. The author-manager wants "to pack all [the Characters] into a neat little framework and then act what isactable." In order to do this he cuts and shapes in such a way as to do violence to the reality of the Characters. He wants action and dislikes long philosophical speeches, so he cuts the complex speeches of the Father who is trying desperately to convey his agonized recognition of guilt but at the same time to present his view that sins of the flesh are natural to man and that one unfortunate slip cannot alone characterize a man who has always acted with the best intentions. The Step-daughter finds the author-manager equally intractable, for she feels that she is the innately modest but unfortunate victim of circumstances while the Father is no more than a lecherous brute. To realize this she insists that the Father in the seduction scene speak the line he actually used in the bordello, "Ah well, then let's take off this little frock." And she wants herself presented as a noble heroine who is forced to do so. The author-manager refuses to handle the scene in this way, and the Step-daughter points out to him that all he wants to do is "to piece together a little romantic sentimental scene out of my disgust, out of all the reasons, each more cruel and viler than the other, why I am what I am." The author-manager points out realistically that since the Father was not her first customer, she is not entitled to the modesty which she feels she has. The suffering of the Mother, the Son, and the two young children eludes the author-manager altogether for how can he do anything with a young man who refuses to talk or act, a mother who cannot speak more than a few lines without breaking into sobs, or young children who wander aimlessly and silently about the stage throughout the play? But each of these characters is suffering, and at the end of the play the Boy shoots himself because he cannot endure any longer.

All of this the realistic author-manager is willing to destroy "in the name of a vulgar, commonplace sense of truth" in order to achieve his "neat little framework." The Father speaks for all the Characters when he sums up his own plight: "Each one of us has within him a whole

world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do."

In other words, for Pirandello and for his Characters true reality is their sense of themselves and their agonized awareness of the impossibility of making others understand them. The other Characters and the author-manager, like the characters in *The Sea Gull*, destroy this reality in order to construct their own *realistic* plays. The realistic perspective, as the Father points out, "creates credible situations in order that they may appear true." But "life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true."

Realism as a mode of life or a mode of drama is thus shown to be inadequate because in its search for objective truth it is killing, for objective truth is an illusion—there are as many truths as there are individuals. In the same way that the author-manager destroys the characters by crushing them into a neat, actable package, the Characters in their insistence on objective truth destroy one another and in the end destroy the children whose suffering they have neglected in their pursuit of Truth.

Just as Chekhov forged a dramatic method which could render the reality of human suffering by a mixture of modes, so Pirandello developed a type of play which would allow him to focus on the same reality. The surface of his plays are usually made up of realistic details, but the situation which is presented in realistic terms is itself expressionistic and is used to reveal both the illusionary quality of what the realist takes for truth and the unbelievable truth of actual existence. In *Six Characters* the illusionary status of the Characters and their desperate need to be defined and ordered in a play is the expressionistic device. By the end of the play we are shown that, paradoxically, the Characters are more "real" than we, the living, are; for the Characters are at least stable in their predicament whereas in actual life we are always in the process of change and are not the same characters today that we were yesterday. Their inability to define themselves, their lack of concrete reality, and their desperate search for an author who will give them artistic life without destroying their sense of their own worth and meaning, are a true expression of the situation of modern man. We are all the imaginative creations of an author who seems to have abandoned us, and we are all in search of an author who will adjust us to one another and give us a plot. Realism does this. It makes us credible, but only by obliterating those parts of ourselves which seem truly to us to be our essence.

Both Chekhov and Pirandello created plays written in a mixture of modes which bring the individual and his suffering into relief, but they do so only by ignoring any power which transcends man and forces him to certain decisions. Some qualification of this statement is required to adjust it to Chekhov, as we shall see in a moment, but by and large both the dramatists discussed show humanity in a purely human setting. Man can understand himself by understanding others. Tennessee Williams recognizes this as a possibility, but he cannot as Pirandello and Chekhov do, simply deny the validity of the realistic perspective. His plays are unresolved battles between Pirandello's stage-manager and the Characters, and his heroes are usually, though not always, mixtures of Dorn and Trepleff. In each of his plays, Williams poises the human need for belief in human value and dignity against a brutal, naturalistic reality; similarly, symbolism is poised against realism. But where the earlier playwrights were able to concentrate on human values, Williams has been unable to do so because of his conviction that there is a "real" world outside and inside each of us which is actively hostile to any belief in the goodness of man and the validity of moral values. His realism gives expression to this aspect of the world, and *Streetcar Named Desire* is his clearest treatment of the human dilemma which entails the dramatic dilemma. We are presented in *Streetcar* with two polar ways of looking at experience: the realistic view of Stanley Kowalski and the "non-realistic" view of his sister-in-law, Blanche Du Bois. Williams brings the two views into conflict immediately.

When Blanche first arrives in the "Elysian Fields" she is terrified by its shabbiness, animality, and dirt, and, pointing vaguely out the window, says, "Out there I suppose is the ghoulish, haunted woodland of Weir!" Her sister, Stella, replies, "No, honey, those are the L & N tracks." This is the basic problem which has kept the modern theater boiling: Is the modern world best described as a "ghoul-haunted woodland" or a neutrally denominated something like "The L and N tracks?" The question is kept open in *Streetcar* in a number of ways. Stanley, suspicious about the amount of clothes and jewelry that Blanche has, decides that she has cheated Stella, and therefore himself, of her inheritance of the old plantation. He, however, mistakes rhinestones for diamonds, junk jewelry for genuine, imitation furs for white fox, and a mortgage-ridden, twenty-acre, decayed plantation for a cotton kingdom. The mistake is the mistake of the realist who trusts to literal appearances, to his senses alone.

In the course of the play Williams manages to identify this realism with the harsh light of the naked electric bulb which Blanche covers with a Japanese lantern. It reveals pitilessly every line in Blanche's face, every tawdry aspect of the set. And in just this way Stanley's pitiless and probing realism manages to reveal every line in Blanche's

soul by cutting through all the soft illusions with which she has covered herself. But it is important to note that it is an artificial light, not a natural one, which reveals Blanche as old and cheap. She is so only when judged by a way of looking at things which insists that the senses are the only true measure of things, and only that is real which is a "thing."

But while the play makes clear the limitations of realism as an approach to experience, it makes it equally clear that this view must be accepted, however much we may dislike it; and Williams here and in his other plays dislikes it a great deal. The "realistic" point of view has the advantage of being workable. Blanche's romantic way of looking at things, sensitive as it may be, has a fatal weakness: it exists only by ignoring certain portions of reality. This is shown in a number of ways in *Streetcar*, principally in Blanche's refusal to face up to certain acts of her past and the present reality of her own sexual drives which she covers over with such words as "flirting." The movement of the play is towards a stripping away of these pretensions and culminates in the scene where Stanley rapes Blanche. As Stanley destroys each of Blanche's pretensions, pointing out that she didn't "pull any wool over this boy's eyes," Blanche tries desperately to telephone for help, but doesn't know the address. She turns to the window, still looking for help, and looks at the *facts*: "A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her and there is a struggle. A policeman's whistle breaks it up Some moments later the Negro Woman appears around the corner with a sequined bag which the prostitute had dropped on the walk. She is rooting excitedly through it." Here is reality, "raw and lurid," the animal struggle for existence which has replaced the bourgeois drawing room in the modern theater. Yet Blanche has always known these facts. Her husband turned out to be a pervert, then committed suicide. Belle Reve was mortgaged away to provide for the "epic fornications" of her ancestors, and death in its most terrible shapes made its home in her house for many years. When reproached by Mitch for deception she replies, simply, "I didn't lie in my heart." Just as she had turned from the death in Belle Reve to the "life" of casual amours, so she had turned away from the misery of "reality" to her romantic evasions. But Stanley hates her, has to prove his dominance, and after analyzing her in his own "realistic" terms, rapes her. Reality has forced itself on her, and she has no way left to travel except madness and death. She cannot live with what Williams and most men of our time unhappily regard as reality.

But it remains for Stella to make a choice. She stands between these two, for they are the pure products of their respective views while Stella, like most humans, participates in both, born kin to the "romantic" and married to the "realistic." Her moral sense is still active, for she points out to Eunice that "I couldn't believe [Blanche's] story and

go on living with Stanley." Eunice's answer contains the dreadful truth of our times, "Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going." Man, then, says the play, has a moral sense and an aesthetic sense which looks on the world and names it correctly "The ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir," but such knowledge is useless though not untrue. Useless because you can only live in that Woodland if you rob it of all its terrors by giving it the neutral and spiritually empty denomination of "The L & N tracks." This is the pragmatic test, and behind it lies the only "truth" that Williams will maintain, "you've got to keep on going."

For Williams, as for Pirandello, the "truth" of Nature is undefinable. He only knows that the face it turns toward us is brutal and savage, the "real camino," not the "Camino Real." But rather than trying to penetrate it he falls back on showing that "realism" is simply a man-made mode of coming to terms with a world it could not otherwise face. Yet Williams' violent fluctuations between expressionism and a Zolaesque realism, his delight in rich symbolism even in the midst of his most realistic plays, suggest a sensitive awareness of absolute moral values and of a Nature which transcends the misery of the "Elysian Fields."

Despite very real differences in technique and tone in these three plays, they all turn on the fundamental and often noted similarity between life and the stage, of the problem of the individual in "constructing" a life and the author in constructing a play. And their plays are perfect images of our time, for they reveal our characteristic relativism, concern for epistemology, pragmatism, and unwilling acquiescence in naturalism. But a play and life differ in the long run, for where in life one may stumble around in relativism until the end of his days never knowing whether he has successfully distinguished the real from the unreal, in art reality is manifested in some form, and the decisions of the characters can be measured against this reality.

In *The Sea Gull* reality is represented by the symbol of the impassive lake. It is always there, brooding and mysterious, and life goes on around its edges. Unlike Lear's thunder the lake is morally neutral, never correlated to human affairs; because it has no distinct quality of its own it can provide a background for all of the various kinds of drama played before it. And wisdom consists in declaring, as Nina finally does, that she is not a sea gull, merely a natural creature of the lake, but an actress, one who moves and gestures in front of it, aware of playing only a role. The inscrutability of the lake is representative of one aspect of the contemporary view of Nature, and the absolute impenetrability of the ultimate makes necessary Chekhov's and our relativism and dictates a concern for other human beings rather than for some absolute theory about the human stage.

Pirandello's symbol for reality is more limited than Chekhov's, for the lake at least suggests that there is a mystery, however unfathomable.

But Pirandello's set is merely the stage, and the possibility of anything outside the human theater is never suggested. Reality lies only in the agony of human faces trying desperately to act out the "truth" for others, to feel in touch with the rest of humanity, but always thwarted by some theory of absolute truth.

For Williams, reality is the naturalistic setting of the urban jungle where libido drives us on to the destruction of self and others and where the strong inevitably devour the weak, not for progress but for appetite. In the face of this knowledge he can only half-heartedly affirm that moralistic and poetic approaches are unworkable and that realism is only a way of living with the reality, not a true description of it.

"Truth" has become the villain of the modern theater, for Nature has become inscrutable, or separate from man, or bestial, and what is therefore required is a technique for living, not a description of reality. Out of these estimates of Nature has come the confusion of modes in modern drama, as, unable to escape the terror of existence inherent in such a view of Nature, the playwrights have sought some method of bringing to focus the relative human values. An absolute dramatic mode contains an absolute theory of reality and would therefore be "untruthful" in the modern theater, for it would lead to an unbearable or delusory "reality."

ALVIN B. KERNAN

THE RENAISSANCE OF AMERICAN DRAMA

IT'S TIME TO QUIT DESPAIRING about the state of drama in America. The Broadway theater may have shrunk; the movies may be having leaner days than they used to. But the drama is not on the way to doom. In fact, conditions are right at the present for the production of good drama in America, and there are signs that it is being written and produced.

At present there is a tremendous resurgence of drama, one likely to produce a considerable body of good plays and an increasing interest on the part of the general public in more than mere diverting entertainment. There prevail today conditions resembling those of great periods of dramatic production in the past, and they indicate that things are ripe for a dramatic renaissance.

First of all, novelty of presentation has always aroused public interest in drama. The new development likely to make the greatest difference in dramatic fare has existed for a relatively short time, but long enough to make itself strongly felt and to give impetus to a dramatic renaissance. That new development is television.

Furthermore, the major developments in the drama have come at times when a large segment of the population has sought entertainment from the theater and has greedily devoured whatever playwrights offered, accepting what provided diversion and cherishing whatever gave in addition some revelation about the human race and its problems.

That extensive audience exists today. One need not have the statistics on the number of TV sets in America; one can merely look at the roofs of any town and see that the potential audience for the TV play is tremendous. Furthermore, these people have already paid their money for their sets; and except when the occasional repair bill comes, the owners feel that since they have already paid for the sets they might as well have the entertainment.

Though that audience must take what it gets, it is eager for something better than the run of the mill. The red eyes in the morning after the late movies testify how pitifully willing the audience is to accept even the slimmest of entertainment. The Trendex and Nielsen ratings following *Peter Pan*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Royal Ballet's *Sleeping Beauty* indicate that most of the country made an effort to see something that promised to be out of the ordinary. So an avid and extensive audience is ready for good theater.

In addition to an eager audience, however, a renaissance needs

money to stimulate production. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that money came from wealthy individuals who became patrons of painters or of companies of players. Today that money comes from manufacturers and retailers who are ready to advance large sums of money to produce TV shows, in the hope that this large audience will be pleased enough to buy the products advertised.

Thus there exists the ideal combination of money for production and the necessity of pleasing a wide audience. Boring the audience is likely to do little to aid sales; so the sponsor is eager to have the public provided with the best entertainment his money can buy. No great period of production in drama has ever occurred in which the plays did not appeal to the wide general audience as well as to the critical portion of it.

These three basic conditions—a theatrical medium readily available to almost everyone, money for production, and a wide audience wanting entertainment—are ideal for the production of large quantities of drama. They are likely to improve the quality as well. The man who has something to say to the populace at large should be exultant at the thought of reaching through TV a larger theatrical audience than he could ever have hoped for at any one time in the past. When he has the chance to express his ideas to vast numbers of people and to make money as well, the conditions are ideal for attracting the best of writers.

That TV needs vast numbers of plays and writers is obvious. Repetitions of old movies may help develop critical taste in the audience—and that is all to the good. But the TV audience will not stay around indefinitely for nothing but reshowings of old productions. TV producers and sponsors must recognize this fact, for in the two or three evening hours when the TV audience is largest, drama—and largely new drama—is the preponderant form of entertainment offered. Such a market requires new productions and encourages at least the development of new forms.

Though the direction in which TV drama develops may become a new one, the earlier experiments of stage, screen, and radio obviously influence it greatly. The nineteenth century, with its emphasis on scenic effects like burning tenements, exploding steamships, and setting suns visible on stage, concentrated the attention on the realistic element in staging, while it let its characters dangle from cliffs, be turned out into the snow by moustache-twirling villains, and mouth such unlikely sentiments as "Unhand me, villain," and "Lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine." The credibility of characters and action was ignored as the audience clamored for more and more spectacular scenic effects.

But when the movies came into being, the stage found itself in a blind alley. The movies could supply greater realism of setting than the stage could, and so the audience which had been looking largely for scenic thrills like Indian massacres or tying men to railroad tracks in the path of the onrushing express train departed to that portion of the theater which could provide the spine-tingling thrills of photographic realism.

Deserted by a large segment of its audience, the live stage turned to satisfying the entertainment demands of what remained of its supporters. The sets became background—sometimes realistic, sometimes suggestive—but background for something absent from the stage for most of the nineteenth century—credible, recognizable characters who spoke and acted like people in the actual world. So the change in theatrical audience helped to bring an interest once again in live people on the stage, people whose problems and interests resembled those of the audience.

The other major emphasis on the value of the spoken word in drama came from radio. Stripped of the scenic effect on which the movies relied extensively and on which the stage leaned also, the radio had to make its dramatic appeal entirely through sound. Sound effects were of course useful, but audience who stayed at home to listen to the radio were entertained largely by what people said.

The experimenting and searching done by the stage, the screen, and the radio have made the development of TV drama simpler. TV can avoid some of the dead ends that the other media have met. Though by mobility and film it can supply realistic backgrounds better than the stage can, it can also use to advantage the skeletal or suggestive set that the stage has used increasingly as emphasis on credible characters and the power of language has returned. The wide screen of the movies, on the other hand, is so superior to the small TV screen for spectacular scenic effects that TV drama seems likely to put more emphasis on the play than on the scenery.

In addition, where there is advantage in the carefully edited, re-worked performance, TV can follow the pattern of the movies and film the show. It can also supply in "live television" some of the spontaneity that makes the stage performance exciting. Finally, like radio, it has the audience in relaxed comfort (instead of in cramped theater seats) ready to be entertained and to listen to what is said.

With a theater as wide as the country, with ample money for financing drama, with a nearly all-inclusive audience to be satisfied, with the lessons learned from other media that preceded it, what is TV likely to produce in this dramatic renaissance? Basically, the plays will of course have much in common with other drama, for drama does,

after all, present people in action, working out their destinies in some way or other, to comic or tragic endings. Drama is likely to go on being much like this.

The demands of TV will, however, affect the form and the content too. Because of the expense, most sponsors are unwilling to pay for much TV time, and in the time they pay for, they want their products sold to the audience. So the hour-long play actually comes to about fifty minutes of production time, interrupted two or three times for the purpose of the commercial. The thirty-minute play is about twenty-five minutes long, with one interruption for commercial pushers. In essence, both of these are what we have known in the past as one-act plays. They require swift characterization, rapid plot development, and hasty denouement—characteristics more like the one-act than the three-act play of the past.

Most of such plays are sure to be melodramas. Melodrama aims at arousing terror, or at least suspense, in the audience. For such purposes, TV has certain advantages. No rustling audience distracts the viewer from immediate preoccupation with the play itself when he watches it at night at home. Furthermore, there is greater isolation at home than in the theater. Such circumstances are almost ideal for making the audience susceptible to the spell of melodrama.

In addition, as radio discovered, the melodrama offered several advantages for the thirty-minute play. Melodramatic characters are essentially flat, needing only broad strokes of characterization. Melodramatic action is violent and swift, leaving little time for attention to more than the barest plot line. In half an hour, there is time enough to build suspense and not enough time for the audience to weary of the effect and to become inattentive.

The danger of melodrama is that the characters are so flat and the action so swift that the play may lapse into unreality. But when TV added realistic settings and put its emphasis on stories like those in the daily newspapers, the speed of characterization and action did not destroy the illusion of reality. In combining these two strands, TV began to develop its own form of melodrama, at its best a very good one, as the long years of the success of *Dragnet* and *Highway Patrol* attest. Apparently, an audience, when given a chance, rejects unlikely sensationalism in favor of melodrama which has at least a degree of credible realism.

But *Wire Service*, *Mr. District Attorney*, *Big Town* disappear. So, too, will many of the westerns that dominate the TV screen this year. Though they have a degree of plausibility—the audience believes that policemen, western marshals, scouts, Indians, and newspapermen are the sort of people to whom high adventure is native—in time the plausibility of such programs disappears. The same set of characters become incredible when they have too much adventure of the same sort. We

are told that the actors who appear in these series tire of them; so, apparently, do the people in the audience when the characters cease to seem real.

Those melodrama programs which survive over a long period have found ways of prolonging the illusion of reality. The criminals on *Dragnet* are realistically unglamorous; the police detective frets over such things as his wife's irritation when he does not show up for dinner. *Big Town* and *Mr. District Attorney* relied on the chase to catch the audience's initial interest, but added the serious ingredient of the concern of the ordinary man for justice, decency, and fair treatment for himself and for his fellow man. Westerns like *Wagon Train* replace all the central figures, keeping only one or two figures from week to week for continuity. The "adult" westerns have tried two other realistic variations: sometimes the hero loses to the villain; occasionally, the hero and the villain are mixtures of vice and virtue. All of these variations indicate a more serious approach to what was once merely escape entertainment.

Curiously, increasingly serious treatment regularly accompanies the popularity of any given literary form. We can see it happening even in the comic strips—in *Rex Morgan, M.D.*, for example. The availability of a wide audience attracts writers who have something serious to say about the human problems we confront; the form may start as mere idle entertainment; it becomes in addition entertainment which presents serious ideas. From such a combination good drama has regularly resulted. Good drama, moreover, is being produced today from such a combination, and the big audience and the plentiful money of TV are likely to continue to help produce it.

Tragedy, too, is likely to receive considerable impetus from TV, though its form is sure to be different from that of much of melodrama. Being essentially action at the expense of character development, melodrama can be more readily reduced to formula than can tragedy; it can, moreover, be done in a shorter time than can tragedy. So tragedy is more likely to appear not in the form of a drama series with the same central characters each week, like *Meet McGraw*, *Robin Hood*, and *Harbor Command*, but in longer dramas which are completely self-contained units, such as the plays offered on several of the weekly hour-long dramatic shows.

For in tragedy—and likewise in what might best be called serious drama—the development of the characters of the central figures becomes of major significance. We are concerned not only with what happens to these people, but with the characters as credible people made up of the same conflicting drives, desires, interests that we ourselves have, which influence their actions when they meet the prob-

lems out of which the plot of the play arises. If the playwright is to make us believe in his characters, he must have time to reveal their complexities, and the hour-long drama offers him a better chance of doing a credible and moving play than the half-hour play does.

The need, too, for a different set of characters for each serious play is also apparent. The crises of serious drama and of tragedy are not unlike those which people in the world about us meet. But most people have few such crises in their lives. If the same set of people meet crisis after crisis, week after week, the air of realism is destroyed, and the result is soap opera, like *Dr. Hudson's Secret Journal*, or situation comedy, which at its best tries to maintain an air of reality by making the crises minor ones.

Even the hour-long drama is somewhat too restricted for the serious play, for there is not time for development of many characters in that time, as there is, say, in a full evening in the theater; so the dramatist who constructs plays for these shows must rely on stories which, like the short story and the one-act play, exclude subplots and fully developed complex minor characters.

Apparently the audience has found fascination in the fully developed serious story and complex characters, for sponsors seem increasingly willing to supply money for longer productions—an hour and a half and even two hours—and many of these are serious plays. The increasing frequency of such programs gives evidence of the fact that that the audience is willing and eager to consume longer plays if there is sufficient meat to the plays to justify longer attention to the characters and their actions. In these productions, sponsors seem to feel that there is sufficient interest to justify pooling the money of more than one sponsor to pay for an hour and a half of consecutive time.

Until recently most of these plays produced on the longer dramatic shows have been established successes drawn from the theater of the last thirty years—*The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *The Little Foxes*—or clearly established classics like *Man and Superman*, *The School for Husbands*, and *Oedipus the King*.

But audiences still like something new. And major TV producers have risked money on plays of serious nature, written for a TV show of more than an hour's duration. In 1955-56 such ventures were only occasional. The past two seasons *Playhouse 90*, devoting most of its time to such productions, appeared weekly; this past season it produced such a play as *The Troublemakers*, a powerful study of the consequences of college-student violence. In the quest for the new, such ventures seem increasingly likely in the future.

These observations should indicate why TV seems likely to do much in the years to come to develop realistic melodrama and serious drama.

But we do not want to be serious or terrified all the time. Audiences have always liked to laugh better than they like to cry. TV producers are not likely to ignore the audience's desire to be amused.

What, then, is to become of comedy in this new form of theater? It seems likely to come off less successfully than melodrama or serious drama. For though the stock gags of the comedian may be funny at home—how can anyone deny the continued success of Jack Benny?—the comedy of plot as we have known it seems less successful at home in our isolation than it does in the theater. *Time Out for Ginger* was funny to audiences in a Broadway theater, but on TV, despite even Jack Benny's valiant efforts, it seemed stupidly silly. People who saw the British film *The Lavender Hill Mob* in a theater nearly drowned out the dialogue with laughter; to them the scene in which the two crooks raced down a spiral staircase on the Eiffel Tower was exhaustingly funny. To people who saw the movie for the first time on TV, the slapstick buffoonery seemed merely silly.

Apparently we abandon our rational judgments more readily when we are in groups than we do when we are alone at home. Certainly we are more inclined to laugh aloud in the theater than in privacy. And laughter is infectious. The more people there are laughing, the more readily the laughter spreads. The absurdities of slapstick are less laughable in the silence of the living room.

On the other hand, when laughter does not deafen the spectator, he can hear the lines he has often wondered about but not heard because of the laughter of the theater audience. Verbal cleverness and deft bits of comic acting come over on TV with considerable success. With the general popular preference for comedy, we seem likely, then, to get comedy which emphasizes witty dialogue and clever credible characters, not slapstick.

Even this type of comedy needs assistance, however, in amusing the home audience to the point of laughing out loud. The producers of *Blithe Spirit* on TV a few seasons ago acknowledged the fact that the stage has an advantage in presenting comedy. The innovation was a surprise, but not an unwelcome one. A burst of applause from a supposed audience greeted the appearance of Noel Coward, Lauren Bacall, and Claudette Colbert in the first act; normal audience laughter punctuated the clever dialogue. Apparently the producers felt that these additions tended to make the home audience find the comedy funnier, for since that time several other TV comedies have used the same device.

All the developments mentioned so far, however, TV has made from dramatic forms and materials which it has taken over from elsewhere. So far, in its infancy, TV has drawn much of its nourishment from the stage and the movies. To be significant, it must create a body of

material on its own. There are signs that it is doing so and that it is contributing material which in turn the stage and the movies will draw upon.

The mere quantity needed necessitates original writing for TV. An ordinary week in many a midwestern city affords approximately eighty plays (of varying lengths), not to count the old movies and the afternoon soap-opera types of diversion for the ironing housewife. Such a rate provides about fifty times as many plays on TV in a year as Broadway offers to the public.

With such numbers of plays, producers can take a risk on a play which the Broadway producer cannot. The theater can be darkened and closed if there is no play to fill it. But TV channels are committed to offering some kind of entertainment daily and hourly. Something must fill these hours. Since producers are looking constantly for new ways to entertain the waiting audience, they are likely to experiment with new techniques and new ideas, and they can afford to find out how an audience reacts to a production of such an unusual show as Conrad Aiken's "Mr. Arcularis," since, unlike the Broadway or movie producer, TV producers are not stuck with the play for more than one performance, if it turns out to be a dud. The ability and willingness to take the risk of doing something new and different is healthy for this new medium.

Already there are signs that TV is repaying its debt to the movies and the stage. It has served as a place for trial runs before costly movie and stage production. *Marty* was a TV creation; it was even more successful, with critics and the general public, as a movie. One program was used to try out new scripts on which a major movie studio had taken options. At least that way a playwright got a hearing.

Broadway, too, has profited from TV. *No Time for Sergeants* was a TV play before it was produced for the theater. Though laughing comedy might not successfully move from the theater to TV, a play that made an audience laugh at home is almost assured of success in the theater.

Skeptics were sure that Walt Disney's releasing *Davy Crockett* on TV would kill it at the box office. We know better. NBC's showing of *Richard III* on TV before it opened in movie theaters lured many to go to the theater to see a movie they might otherwise have ignored. The movie industry has been saying for some time that movies are better than ever; maybe one of these days, thanks to TV, they will be.

These instances of TV's contribution to other dramatic media are, however, still few in number. Meanwhile, TV has begun to produce some interesting plays from material not used by the stage or the movies. The adaptation of "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz" seemed almost a perfect realization of Fitzgerald's story of a fanatical tycoon of the 1920's. The *Omnibus* documentary of the Billy Mitchell court-

martial was an imposing drama, written for TV production—not adapted from the movie—and making effective use of the immediacy of TV. The semi-documentary productions *The Great War* and *The Jazz Age* were moving TV dramas. The verse play about the Battle of Gettysburg was an interesting experiment, which at least suggested some of the drawbacks of verse plays in the twentieth century.

The adaptation of *A Night to Remember*, the story of the sinking of the *Titanic*, proved so successful a drama that only a few weeks after the original production it was presented for a second viewing. Undoubtedly the compression of the book into an hour play necessitated the omission of some of the details of the book, but the presentation in visible form made possible the omission of many words and made the relentless rush of events overpowering. Here the combination of the spontaneity of live stage performance with scenic effects normally possible only after weeks and months of filming suggests one of the possible directions for future TV dramatic development.

In addition to the documentaries, there are a host of fictional dramas—and the list becomes imposing as one looks back over the programs week by week. One of the more interesting in recent seasons was a play concerned with a defense lawyer who in his belief that his client was guilty was in effect denying the client the right of fair trial. This past season one play presented effectively the case of a girl who, as the sole hearing member of a deaf family, retreats from her responsibilities by becoming hysterically deaf.

One of the most powerful dramas of the past few seasons was *Tragedy in a Temporary Town*, a play in which a father, living in a work camp with his family, was faced with the problem of standing up against mob injustice or wrongly protecting his own son. That was the play in which Lloyd Bridges, in his final burst at the cowardice of the prejudiced mob, became so worked up that he adlibbed profanity not called for in the script. The father's torture from the conflict of wishing to protect his son from mob attack and at the same time wishing to prevent the injustice of having the wrong boy punished merely because he was Mexican has a reality which comes home to many of us in a world as fraught with racial problems as ours is.

In addition to these adaptations, documentaries, and original dramas, TV is making other dramatic and theatrical contributions. Some relatively creditable operas have been written for TV—*Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *The Trial at Rouen*. In musical comedy, TV has produced a revival of *Annie Get Your Gun* and some new musicals never seen on Broadway. The musical versions of *Our Town*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and *Huckleberry Finn* may not have improved the original plays or stories, but *High Tor* seemed better, for the music enhanced the fantasy. During the summer of 1956, there was

an original musical comedy making use of TV camera-trick techniques and sporting an amusing plot and a clever score—*The Bachelor*.

Of course, one may protest that the main body of plays is of the soap-opera sentimental type, or incredible melodrama. So it is. So has it always been. To be sure, the Renaissance produced Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli, Leonardo, and Titian, but what of the hundreds of others whose works were worthless and have been forgotten? In the age of Elizabethan drama, for the few good plays of any one year, the records indicate many more which are better forgotten. It would have been exciting to go to the theater to see a new Shakespearean play in that age and to meet an unheralded *Hamlet*; but suppose it had been *Titus Andronicus*.

The activity in American TV today is hopeful for the future of all forms of the drama. Some evening soon TV may unexpectedly give us a new play as overpowering as *Othello*. With such a surge of dramatic activity, it seems possible and perhaps even likely.

JAMES T. NARDIN

THEATER IN STOCKHOLM

For an American who comes from a metropolitan center fairly comparable, population-wise, to Greater Stockholm with its more than a million inhabitants, the Stockholm theaters are always amazing and delightful. For, as *Theater in Sweden* (*World Theatre*, Vol. IV, New York, 1955) has made amply clear, Sweden is as close to being a paradise for those interested in drama and theater as any country has ever been in modern times, and Stockholm, both the capital and the largest city, is the center of theatrical activity that extends throughout all of Sweden. Personal observation during attendance at performances of most of the many plays presented in Stockholm and its suburbs during five months of the 1957-1958 season confirms earlier impressions of the tremendous opportunities for Stockholmers and visitors to see good plays, both Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian; productions imaginatively designed and effectively executed; an amazingly good and even level of acting by actors and actresses who usually have been trained in either the schools attached to the Royal Dramatic Theater or various city theaters elsewhere or in private schools; a large and dignified body of faithful theater goers; and, what impresses this American at least, the conviction on the part of Swedes, officials and non-officials, that theater is a vital part of the Swedish way of life.

It is difficult to say how many legitimate theaters there are in Stockholm. Although many Stockholmers say there are twelve, it soon becomes clear to the visitor that remarkably good productions are put on in locales that are not among the twelve the Stockholmer has in mind. The five months would have been decidedly disappointing for anyone who was particularly interested in seeing native Swedish plays if he had been confined to the productions at the twelve.

During the regular season the Stockholm theaters have neglected Sweden's greatest playwright, August Strindberg, in an almost unbelievable fashion. To be sure, the Royal Dramatic Theater has put on three of his plays, the major work *Creditors* (*Fördringsägare*) with such able actors as Ulf Palme, Olof Widgren, and Eva Dahlbeck in the roles of Gustaf, Adolf, and Tekla respectively. Sharing the bill with *Creditors* have been, alternately, the relatively unimportant *Playing with Fire* and *Pariah*. The only other Strindberg play one could see through any medium was *Easter* (*Påsk*), which Sweden's Radio put on on TV on Good Friday. When the Royal Dramatic Theater this spring celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of its present building, it did not do so by putting on a memorable production of a Strindberg play but by means of a competent production of Moliere's *Don*

Juan. To all admirers of Strindberg (and there is an apparently increasing number of them among the descendants of the Swedes whom he fascinated or repelled before his death in 1912), it must have seemed very strange that *Master Olof*, which had been the brilliant opening production in 1908, or some other major Strindberg play was not chosen. That the Royal Opera put on Birgit Cullberg's ballet version of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (*Fröken Julie*) from time to time with Elsa Mariann von Rosen brilliantly performing the role of Julie was slight compensation for anyone who would assume that he would have the chance to see productions of some of Strindberg's great expressionistic or historical plays in the playwright's native city.

The Royal Dramatic Theater did not entirely neglect Swedish drama; it put on the Swedish translation of a British dramatization of Hjalmar Bergman's *Grandmother and Our Lord* (*Farmor och Vår Herre*), memorable mainly because of the fascinating qualities of anything that ultimately stems from Hjalmar Bergman's mind and because of the superb acting of Tora Teje as grandmother. Furthermore, the royal theater did revive Carl Jonas Love Almquist's romantic *The Queen's Tiara or Azouras Lazuli Tintomara* (*Drottningens juvelsmycke*) on the little stage (*Lilla scenen*) in what was without question the most brilliant theatrical production in Stockholm during the five months. Combining skill and imagination in direction, staging, and acting, *The Queen's Tiara* not only indicates what the Swedes with their wealth of human and material theatrical resources can accomplish when they turn to native or foreign plays that most directors elsewhere would hesitate to tackle, but probably indicates, too, that the Swedes may be on the way to the discovery that native Swedish drama has far more to offer than many Swedes yet know. Strindberg dreamed a long time ago of reviving or bringing to the stage for the first time Swedish plays from all periods. The public's enthusiastic reception of *The Queen's Tiara* could conceivably lead ultimately to at least a partial realization of Strindberg's dream, say, for example, the staging of Atterbom's romantic *Isle of Bliss* (*Lycksalighetens ö*) or the revival of plays from the period of Gustav III.

One of the most successful Stockholm productions was that of Vilhelm Moberg's *The Judge* (*Domaren*), which ran for over a hundred performances at the Intimate Theater (*Intiman*), partly because the play in spite of weaknesses in dramatic composition in the final acts was very much worth seeing for itself but just as much because of its ideational content. Sweden may look like the model for a world to tourists from abroad, but Swedes themselves do not accept without question and criticism the bureaucratic implications of the welfare state. *The Judge* not only gave good entertainment and good acting but provided the audience with numerous opportunities for laughing at the barbs directed at a system which may be getting too highly

organized. That the play is effective social criticism is attested to by the fact that the directors of theaters in other Swedish cities and in neighboring Scandinavian countries have either already put on *The Judge* or plan to do so next season.

Even though the major theaters neglected native dramas, there were opportunities to see other Swedish plays in the Stockholm area. In February the National Theater (*Riksteatern*) sent one of its troupes to the suburb of Danderyd to put on Sara Lidman's challenging *Job Clockmaker's Daughter* before an enthusiastic, completely filled house in Danderydsgården (The Danderyd Community Hall). A month later the same hall was filled to capacity again when Stockholm actors came out to put on Herbert Grevenius' success of thirty years ago, *Sonja*. Both these plays and Vilhelm Moberg's *The Clenched Fists* (*De knutna händerna*) presented at a theater in the suburb of Sundbyberg in March reveal very definitely the general Swedish enthusiasm about theater, the high level of production and acting, and Swedish (and Scandinavian, in general) continued interest in social problems and the nuances of human psychology.

Two plays from Denmark and Norway were also put on during the season—aside, to be sure, from the highly successful guest performances at the Royal Dramatic Theater by the Danish Royal Theater troupe of Henri Nathansen's *Within the Walls* (*Indenfor murene*) in April and of Soya's *30 års Henstand* by the company of the Folk Theater of Copenhagen on an anniversary tour of the other Scandinavian countries in May. J. H. Wessel's eighteenth-century mock heroic tragedy, *Love without Stockings* (*Kärlek utan strumpor*) was put on by a group of amateurs at the Chamber Theater (*Kammar-teatern*) in a production that at least gave one an opportunity to see the play. The other Danish-Norwegian play was something else again. At the Little Theater (*Lilla teatern*) Holberg's comedy *Jeppe on the Mountain* (*Jeppe på Berget*) enjoyed an impressive run that was richly deserved. Supported by an excellent Swedish cast, the Norwegian guest star Claes Gill created an unsurpassable Jeppe, a realistically interpreted alcoholic, a sort of cross between a troll and a thoroughly pitiful human being.

For the most part, however, the Stockholm theaters devoted most of their energy and time to the presentation of non-Scandinavian plays ranging all the way from revues, musicals, and farces to some of the most serious of recent foreign plays. Two of the larger theaters have been devoted all season to light fare—the Oscar Theater to *No, No, Nanette* and the Vasa Theater to *A Bed for Three* (*Bäddat för tre*), the Swedish version of Claude Magnier's *Monsieur Masure*. More than competently produced, they have drawn full houses for very long runs. A much shorter run was enjoyed by the revival of *Tovarich* at Folkan with the aging but still charming Ernst and Alice Eklund, Sweden's

Lunt and Fontanne, in the two major roles. As effective as anything in the lighter vein was the production of Joseph Kesselring's *Arsenic and Old Lace*, which succeeded *The Judge* at Intiman and whose cast headed by Isa Quensel and Agneta Prytz delighted Stockholm audiences much as American productions delighted American audiences some years ago. Not least attractive to many theatergoers have been happy productions of two Agatha Christie thrillers, *The Spider's Web* at the Little Theater and *The Rat Trap* at the Blanche.

Of the more serious foreign plays none surpassed the Royal Dramatic Theater's production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* (*Utsikt från en bro*). Directed by Alf Sjöberg, one of Sweden's ablest directors, and performed by such exceptional actors as Lars Hanson, Sif Ruud, and Holger Löwenadler, the Miller play received the enthusiastic support of both audiences and theater critics. Far less impressive was Olof Molander's production of Paul Claudel's *Partage de midi* (*När dagen vänder*) in spite of brilliant staging and a cast which included Inga Tidblad, Olof Widgren, Uno Henning, and Bengt Ekerot. The fault lies more in the very structure of the play than with either director or actors, one of whom—Bengt Ekerot—must have set some sort of record in sustaining audience attention to seemingly endless monologs.

There have been other interesting but not extremely exciting productions, notably the Australian Ray Lawler's *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* at the Royal Dramatic; George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House* at the Royal; Christopher Fry's *The Firstborn* at the tiny Marsyas Theater; Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the Allé Theater.

Nor have the productions already mentioned been the limit of what one could see in good theater in Stockholm during these months. In a season that several enthusiastic Stockholm theatergoers have characterized as good but not exceptional, it has been possible to see the commedienne Tollie Zellman appear a few times in Iwo Wiklander's comedy *The Baroness* in the Apollonia Theater; the production of Angelo Beolco's *The Second Dialog* or *Bilora* and Adam de la Halle's *Li Jus Adan ou De La Feuillée* by the student theater at the University of Stockholm; the Uppsala students' production of their highly entertaining farce-like *spex*, *Gustav III*, at the University; and an appreciable number of school and children's plays by exceptionally active school and children's theater organizations.

Nor does theatrical entertainment end in early June with the regular season. Three examples may suffice to indicate in a measure the continuing interest in the theater. Plays and operas are as usual on the schedule of the beautiful and famous eighteenth-century Drottningholm Theater; plays are to be performed, arena style, in the courtyard of the Hallwyl Palace; and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be presented

daily in the open-air theater at Skansen, the outdoor museum which has served as the model for many a like museum both in Sweden and abroad.

Theater is important to the Swedish way of life, and these months in Stockholm have provided ample evidence. In spite of the large number of good theaters, Stockholmers and the government, national and local, are involved in a discussion of obtaining still more space and buildings for its theatrical activities. The Royal Dramatic Theater, for example, will be closed at the end of the 1958 season until 1960 to permit its modernization and extension. A Stockholm City Theater is about to come into being. Further increases by way of subsidies to almost all theatrical activities are being discussed. Even if the Swedes have managed to order their national and local affairs so well that their way may seem undramatic to visitors from less orderly countries, the Swedes still need something by way of dramatic stimulus and outlet. The excellent theaters, the gifted and highly trained actors, and brilliant directors, are providing both for a sympathetic and an enthusiastic public.

WALTER JOHNSON

THEATER IN PARIS

(Translated by R. G. MAHIEU)

EVERY YEAR the Paris dramatic critics give a "Molière Award," the purpose of which is to acknowledge the best performance of the season.

I am a member of the jury and take part in the discussions which oftentimes are impassioned. This year, for a change, almost without any objections being raised, we selected "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" by Brecht, performed last winter by Jean Dasté and his troupe, the Comédie de Saint-Etienne.

Personally, I am pleased with this choice. I deem it a good thing to pay tribute to Brecht (even though it happens after his death) and also to the staging by Dasté, who, with a happier and even more delicate touch in his interpretation than that given by the Berliner Ensemble, will not soon be forgotten in France.

To be sure, other producers had already staged some plays by Brecht: Vilar and Philippe performed "Mother Courage" at the Théâtre National Populaire, and Jean Marie Serreau "Man Is Man" and "The Exception and the Rule." Indeed, for three years in succession the Berliner Ensemble gave performances in Paris. But none of these performances stirred up the public's enthusiasm as did the staging by Dasté. In France, by now, it is well agreed that Brecht is not a dramatist preoccupied with a problem play nor is he an unbearable, ill-mannered pedant as had been said of him—a misconception spread not by Brecht's enemies but by the journalists who were familiar only with Brecht's critical pronouncements. The warm imagination, the light touches, the amplitude which Dasté succeeded in imparting to "The Chalk Circle" have always been present in the play, but it had not been presented before in a style adapted to the Paris public.

But however deserving this decision of the Molière jury may be, we must not forget the less known authors. Personally, I wish that "Histoire de Vasco" by Georges Schéhadé, "Paolo-Paoli" by Arthur Adamov and "Pas Perdus" by Gascar had been brought to the public's attention.

The work of Schéhadé is already important; his poems are well known and the oriental background of the author gives his smooth, flexible images a striking ease. But it is on the stage that Schéhadé has been most successful: "Monsieur Boble" performed ten years ago was one of the great successes of the "new Parisian theatre." In October, when staging Schéhadé's "Histoire de Vasco" at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, Jean Louis Barrault endeavored to present Schéhadé in all his richness.

The play tells the story of the life of a barber who, because of unforeseen circumstances and the will of a dictator—the Mirador General—is forced into the war. Strange war indeed where the men are changed into women and into trees! Here we get Aristophanes and Chaplin together—the Chaplin of “The Great Dictator.” The lively anti-militarism, the warm and humorous pacifism which permeates the “Histoire de Vasco” could not, however, please everybody: there were many objections to the play.

It seems that in October, the Paris “official” critics already were quite sensitive about the subject of military honor; daring comments on that subject from the pen of earlier authors are hard to imagine nowadays, and one sees the proof of it in Barrault, Schéhadé and Vasco.

It is true that Barrault quite unintentionally had done injury to the play by spreading the action on too vast a stage, by adding an epic grandeur not at all in keeping with the light, poetic touch of Schéhadé. But the fact remains that the play was not received as it should have been and polemics ensued: one still remembers the fight that pitted the defender of the play, Jacques Lemarchand, against the Don Diègue of French official criticism, R. Kemp, a durable old man, the only survivor left from the days of Emile Augier.

However, a few weeks after Vasco a new “scandale” was in the making, the one caused by Adamov’s “Paolo-Paoli,” performed at the Vieux Colombier by the director of one of the most remarkable small theaters, Roger Planchon of Lyons.

In order to understand Adamov, one must recall not only the vicissitudes which beset the avant-garde theatre, but also the very evolution of one of the most interesting authors of the young school.

I have a clear recollection that when I was still the dramatic critic of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, now five or six years ago, I was endeavoring to find out what new forms one could suggest to counteract the prevailing trivial productions of the Paris theatre. The authors who ten years previously had made their appearances—Sartre, Camus, Audiberti—had been successful but had failed to bring out anything very new after Giraudoux or Jules Romains, in fact, quite the contrary. Then I ventured to speak of the “School of Paris” which included Vauthier, Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Schéhadé, the last at that time still unknown.

This term, “School of Paris,” in which were brought together men from different countries who used French as a medium and whose common goal was a renewal of the theatre, appeared to me not too far-fetched. I recognized in this group a certain similarity to that renowned colony of painters who before 1914 had attracted European artists toward cubism. And as cubism has been generally accepted today, so has this school. If the avant-garde of yesterday is not already

an *arriere-garde*, at least it has become a solidly established school. Young playwrights such as Beckett or Ionesco are producing steadily; Adamov's plays are performed in Germany or Italy. And what was said of cubism must also be said of this school—it is well to have achieved so much, but it is necessary also to break new ground.

Themes treated by the *avant-garde* were doubtless new then and strikingly so. Man was reduced to his most elemental form according to the precepts of Antonin Artaud, the psychological plot was left aside (but not psychology, of course, as some over-hasty minds have claimed); the playwrights were bent upon giving a harsh and cruel image of the human condition, along the lines of the "psycho-drama" of the celebrated Dr. Moreno! This being the case, the resources of the school were meager and meager also was its power of invention. The new rigorosity was a necessary step in dramatic development, but it was necessary also to go farther—to see life whole.

At this point Adamov appeared. Instead of remaining within the narrow limits of the *avant-garde* which he had helped to shape, he has endeavored the last three or four years to break away from the group. I remember his declarations in Berlin last October, when together with the Swedish, German and Italian playwrights, we held one of those meetings dealing with things of the theatre which the Germans are so fond of. Adamov declared that he wished to bring to his theatre a social orientation, and that he wished to impress upon the public the need for a strong social awareness.

With this in mind he wrote "Paolo-Paoli," in many ways a political pamphlet which could have served as a satire of France in the years preceding the war of 1914. The play deals with the lives of two small industrialists who are interested only in following the ups and downs of business enterprises and nationalism at the most crucial moment when the country was preparing for war.

I have often had occasion to call attention to the resourcefulness of Adamov: he enlarges or tries to enlarge his horizon, but not at the cost of abandoning the techniques of his art, which have been unique since the beginning of his career. A series of tableaux reminds us of his first plays when he was still much under the influence of Brecht and the metaphysics acquired from a reading of Kafka. Adamov has not changed, he has enriched his art.

Doubtless he is far from having reached his goal, for he has aimed far, and he will have to try many times. As we cannot know whether he is on the right track except by sizing up the effects it may have on his talent, we must wait for the play which he intends to write on the Commune of Paris in order to appraise the worth of his undertaking.

The fact is that "Paolo-Paoli," in spite of its clumsiness and its length, appealed to the general public in spite of the official critics who are indignant about the audacious implications of the play. In a certain

sense, nevertheless, that work sounded the death knell of the avant-garde and reminded playwrights that the theater has *also* an obligation to teach a moral lesson, as Schiller used to say. And whether he knows it or not, Adamov follows in the footsteps of Schiller.

It is worth noticing that Pierre Gascar, who in the past was awarded the Goncourt Prize for his very beautiful book, *Les Bêtes*, has selected for his first plays a dramatic form which is closely related to the social satire. There is indeed something new in the Paris theatre. It has been noticeable the last few months, and the recent political crisis is not likely to inhibit this new trend—on the contrary!

The technique of Gascar, not yet entirely freed from its contact with the technique of the novel, is nevertheless apparent enough. To tell a sordid story, he pretends to justify what he condemns and presents as worthy of our esteem what he intends to criticize. "*Les Pas Perdus*" deals with a prostitute with a kind heart, who, feeling sorry for a bankrupted middle-class family, entrusts it with her own savings. Is she hoping to regain a good conscience by bartering her material goods in order to redeem the honor of a "good family"? Is she truly back in the fold? She barely has time to think about it. Once the family's business is again on a sound footing, "morality" is back where it was before. The "fille des rues," who has the temerity to remind the family of her good deeds, is ignominiously thrown out.

"*Les Pas Perdus*" is a solidly constructed play. It deserved a better reception than the one given it. Let us hope that Gascar does not feel discouraged.

"Paolo-Paoli," "*Les Pas Perdus*," and "*Vasco*" are extreme cases of good plays which have not been recognized by the critics—extreme, since the daily newspapers did receive enthusiastically "*The Diary of Anne Frank*," successfully adapted by Georges Neveux. The newspapers also spoke well of Osborne's "*Look Back in Anger*" and Arthur Miller's "*View from the Bridge*," which was staged by Peter Brook.

But these extreme cases—an intimate association with the theatre will supply sufficient proof of it—are genuine indications of the present trend in the theatre. Following the avant-garde of ten years ago, signs point, if not to a new avant-garde, at least to a kind of searching by playwrights for a coherent and sound dramaturgy preoccupied with the vital problems of modern life. Television and the movies have taught the dramatists that if they want to reach the public, they must interest the public by presenting situations that will give it food for thought—that are of immediate concern. And at the same time without forgetting that the theatre is an art.

Otherwise, no startling revelations occurred during the past season: a good performance of Pirandello's "*Henry IV*" at the Théâtre National Populaire, a pleasant evening spent at the same theatre with "*Ubu-Roi*" by Jarry, a few mistakes (Barrault putting on "*Le Chateau*" by Kafka,

and Vilar murdering Racine's "Phèdre"); a few disappointing performances of old plays such as Camus' "Caligua," some plays by newcomers which fell short of expectation. And then the usual run of things, the many plays whose success lasts three months, six months, and which are soon forgotten by everyone

JEAN DUVIGNAUD

MY FAIR LADY¹

My Fair Lady is a very charming musical comedy and I'm told that *The Chocolate Soldier* was an equally charming operetta. Both are made from plays by Bernard Shaw. Neither of them was authorized by him. It can, of course, be asserted that Mr. Shaw would have authorized *My Fair Lady* had he had the opportunity. I doubt this, for *My Fair Lady* is un-Shavian in spirit and cancels out most of the points that are made in *Pygmalion*. The ending of the work has been changed but that's the least of it. The whole second act of the musical—and it only has two acts—is much weaker than the first one and this is because it is even less Shavian. The adapters may have begun by making only small changes in the last five minutes of the play but these changes became larger and made others necessary back and back and further back into the action. Even the characters had to be changed. Higgins, who had been the very type of an eccentric professor, becomes an average man and is celebrated as such in a song. It can scarcely be denied, I think, that the dramatic ideas of the author, Mr. Alan J. Lerner, are extremely dull. My point here is rather that they are also un-Shavian. I recall an article of Mr. Lerner's in which he declared Shaw's ending to be too logical. His own, we were asked to believe, was much more real. The exact opposite of this seems to me to be the truth. Eliza's leaving Higgins is the outcome of the realities of the situation. The notion that she would marry him springs from a very cool calculation as to what the public would lick its chops over. One is drama; the other, musical comedy. That is to say, one is human reality in its richness; the other a facile daydream. Mr. Shaw presented the dynamics of real human conflict. Mr. Lerner cheats and presents pleasing illusions according to a well-established formula.

Mr. Shaw's play, like all Mr. Shaw's plays, begins in parody of romance and melodrama. The people who make films and musical shows out of Mr. Shaw's plays go back to a point before the beginning. They return to that very romance and melodrama which Mr. Shaw spent all his energies getting away from. Certainly he is their friend in that his prose raises the level of their entertainment wherever they quote it without change. But they shouldn't ask to be regarded as his friends as their whole effort is to undo what he spent the best part of a century doing.

I recommend, then, that you attend *My Fair Lady* but leave in the interval, go home and read the last act of *Pygmalion*. Even in the

1. By permission of *The Shavian*, Summer Number, 1958.

interval you can sell your ticket for enough money to buy the collected works of Bernard Shaw with.

ERIC BENTLEY

BOOK REVIEWS

LE THÉÂTRE CONTEMPORAIN EN GRANDE-BRETAGNE ET AUX ÉTATS-UNIS, special number of *Études Anglaises*, edited by L. Bonnerot, M. Le Breton, and P. Legouis, Paris, Oct.-Dec., 1957.

The critical and popular acclaim bestowed upon Ethel Voynich by the Russians has reaffirmed for many English readers the belief that literary reputation is often dependent upon fortuitous circumstance and cultural conditioning. A similar effect may be produced by this recent special issue of *Études Anglaises*, which is devoted entirely to the contemporary theatre in Great Britain and the United States. No American reader who has followed the development of his theatre at all will be surprised to find the stimulating discussion of Eugene O'Neill's recently produced plays (Suzanne Fleche-Salgues, "Trois Pièces Récentes d'Eugene O'Neill"); and, like it or not, no one would seriously question the inclusion of Tennessee Williams in a general survey of contemporary American theatre; but undoubtedly many will be surprised to find that the only other American dramatist to be treated in any detail is Thornton Wilder (C. Arnavon, "La Vogue de Thornton Wilder"). Devotees of the naturalistic pathos of our modern theatre may be somewhat disturbed by the omission of William Inge and Arthur Miller; others who reflect nostalgically upon the "golden" decade (1920-30) in American drama may feel that men like Elmer Rice, Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, George Kelly, and Philip Barry are more representative than Thornton Wilder. British readers will find even more surprises in this special number of *Études Anglaises*. Some may question the contemporaneity—or at least the "modernity" in form and ideas—of James Bridie (Gabriel Marcel, "Le Théâtre de James Bridie"); Granville-Barker (A. J. Farmer, "Harley Granville-Barker"); Somerset Maugham (J. Dobrinsky, "Les Débuts de Somerset Maugham au Théâtre"); and J. B. Priestley (C. Nigot, "Le Théâtre de J. B. Priestley"). And, undoubtedly, many will deplore the omission of Shaw whose plays continue to exert more influence upon modern drama than those by Priestley or Maugham.

Obviously all the significant contemporary playwrights in Great Britain and the United States could not be adequately treated in a single issue of a scholarly journal. But this special number fails to give a representative view of either British or American theatre not so much because of its sins of commission and omission, but because it lacks a unifying theme or principle which would permit a certain amount of analysis and synthesis of relevant material. By no means a symposium, as its title may suggest, it is simply an arbitrary collection of fourteen essays which deal with playwrights who have written in English during the past forty or fifty years. Only two of the fourteen essays attempt to go beyond the work of individual playwrights. Unfortunately, these are both disappointing. M. Poulénard's "Le Modernisme au Théâtre" is nothing more than a series of miniature reviews of books by Ronald Peacock, John Gassner, Norman Marshall, and Frederick Lumley. And M. Villard's "Introduction à une Étude du Théâtre Américain d'Aujourd'hui"—certainly a formidable undertaking—gets hopelessly lost in the vast distances that separate such plays as *The Great Divide*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *I Remember Mama*, and *Harvey*.

Although "Le Théâtre Contemporain en Grand-Bretagne et aux États-Unis" does not offer a representative or balanced treatment of its subject, it does include some fine discussion of the work of individual British and American playwrights.

The following seem to be the most effective essays in the journal and the most interesting to English and American readers:

1. O. Mandel's "Themes in the Drama of Christopher Fry" is a defense against the charge that the English poet-dramatist is merely a "word-bubbler" whose pyrotechnic displays of virtuoso language conceal a pitiful dearth of ideas and distract from the essentially static quality of his plays. M. Mandel believes that this inaccurate critical evaluation results from a failure to understand the thematic substance of Fry's plays. Unlike critics William Arrowsmith and Monroe K. Spears, who maintain that Fry is preoccupied with the opposition between the idealistic response to a mysterious universe and the dull routine of everyday reality, M. Mandel believes that his author's view of life is informed by an awareness of a much more basic conflict. According to M. Mandel, it is not the idealistic-pragmatic conflict which provides the center of dramatic interest in Fry's plays; it is rather the opposition of the forces of life to the forces of destruction—in other words, the dramatic application of the Bergsonian Life Force concept. Despite a rather forced reading of "A Phoenix Too Frequent" (M. Mandel rejects the obvious satiric intent of the play in order to make it illustrate his thesis), the author argues convincingly, interprets perceptively, and supports his evaluation of the thematic significance of Christopher Fry's plays with many striking quotations from the playwright.
2. R. Asselineau's "Tennessee Williams ou La Nostalgie de la Pureté" is the sort of essay which teachers of French in this country are fond of calling "un petit aperçu." Although M. Asselineau contributes no new insights into the work of the American dramatist, he traces Williams' development neatly and systematically from the early one-act plays to the recent *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Throughout Williams' work, M. Asselineau observes, as others have observed before him, the playwright's preoccupation with the conflict between sensuality and the sort of romanticized purity which belongs to childhood and is soon lost in a brutal, materialistic society. Blanche Dubois is, of course, as M. Asselineau points out, Williams' most moving creation of that type of purity which is rudely crushed by the animalistic principle. In tracing the development of this conflict in Williams' work, M. Asselineau recognizes a point of departure in *The Rose Tattoo*, a comedy in which sensuality is accepted as a natural expression of the heroine's intense experience of life. Although M. Asselineau's essay is slightly marred by the tendency to generalize dangerously about the motive and direction of his author's work from inconclusive biographical data, it is otherwise a concise and useful introduction to Tennessee Williams' plays.
3. There is considerable reason to doubt that there is at present, or that there ever was, a "vogue" of Thornton Wilder in this country. Nevertheless, M. Arnauv's essay "La Vogue de Thornton Wilder" is especially interesting since it is the only essay in the journal which attempts to say something about our culture in terms of the writing of a single American. M. Arnauv explains the "vogue" of Thornton Wilder by analyzing the playwright's curious association of an urbane anti-intellectualism with a mature philosophical detachment, which leads him to identify the characteristic struggles of the small-town average citizen with those of historical man. Thus, unlike the critics and satirists of American provincialism in the twenties and thirties, Wilder has provided a framework of myth which supports the *status quo* and has, thereby, attracted a large American audience. This is briefly M. Arnauv's theory, but close observation of the commercial theatre in the United States tends to disprove it. Wilder's vigorous experimentalism has kept him

from receiving wide popular acceptance in this country. In fact, he is much more popular in Europe, especially in Germany, where his expressionistic techniques are admired.

4. Perhaps the most stimulating essay in this special number of *Études Anglaises* is J. J. Mayoux's "Le Théâtre de Samuel Beckett," a fine illustration of Gallic lucidity and balance. Dealing with a playwright whose work invites extravagant allegorical interpretation and strains the ingenuity of the critic to isolate and explain his complex symbols, M. Mayoux calmly sticks to the text of Beckett's plays, which he discusses with remarkable understanding and clarity. Some of M. Mayoux's observations are so modest and so quietly stated that it is easy to overlook their acuity. For example, in discussing Pozzo, the "demi-master" in *Waiting for Godot*, M. Mayoux asks the rhetorical question, "Who is Pozzo?" His answer: "He is the one who comes when we are waiting for Godot." Never insisting upon a narrow interpretation, M. Mayoux has written an eminently sane and sensitive treatment of the themes, structure, and poetry of Samuel Beckett's plays.

EDWARD B. GROFF

THE DRAMATIC EXPERIENCE, by Judah Bierman, James Hart, and Stanley Johnson, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1958, 549 pp.

This is an excellent drama text and might well be the answer to the dilemma of many a professor who, after taking the roll, finds one-fourth of his class possessing some knowledge of the professional theatre and the rest familiar only with the high school production of *Charlie's Aunt*. *The Dramatic Experience* solves this problem, for it is sufficiently complex to challenge the mature student yet not too technical to discourage the neophytes.

Section One, "On Reading Drama," is a cogently written, highly compact essay alerting the reader to the problems he faces in reading a play and establishing the norms by which he may best satisfy his own intellectual growth through drama.

Section Two, "The Major Elements of Drama," analyzes by essay and play-example dramas featuring either action, or theme, or character. *The Desperate Hours*, a melodrama by John Hayes, was selected to represent the play of action, *Everyman*, the play to represent theme, and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* by Robert Sherwood, the play of character. Of particular interest in this section is Hayes' own essay describing some of the problems he faced in writing this play from his own "best selling" novel of the same name.

Section Three, "The Elements in Balance," presents Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* as an example of a play that employs action, theme, and character and blends them into an organic whole, within which each is of approximately equal importance.

The second half of *The Dramatic Experience* centers around the major modes of drama with particular emphasis placed upon comedy and tragedy. Section Four offers a study of the various approaches to comedy with Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* as plays exemplifying the comic vision.

The final section entitled "Tragedy" is perhaps the most stimulating. Revealing the various complications surrounding the tragic vision are such dramas as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Accompanying all of these plays are provocative comments.

One may question occasionally why a particular play was selected when several others come to mind that might serve as well or better. This is a minor point, however, and while one may question, he certainly never objects.

The simplest and most direct manner I know of to give my personal appraisal

of *The Dramatic Experience* is to say that I like the text so well I plan to use it in my own drama course.

WILLIAM M. BURKE

PASSAGES FROM *FINNEGANS WAKE*, A Free Adaptation for the Theater, by Mary Manning, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957, 73 pp. Price \$3.25.

Any attempt to adapt *Finnegans Wake* presents staggering problems of cutting, of scenic arrangement, progression and depiction, of thematic emphasis, of the identification of character and speech, and, finally, of coherent dramatic meaning. In her free adaptation, Mary Manning manages to achieve a successful, sometimes brilliant, coherence and progression. The central progression from death to sleep to birth—from the wake of Finnegan to the sleep of Earwicker and to the birth of Anna Livia Plurabelle's child—is skillfully staged by having Finnegan's coffin become Earwicker's bed and finally the child's crib. This central prop, the coffin, becomes the focus of the drama. Around this significant and symbolic center, flows the comic élan vital of Joyce's epic. Thus Miss Manning suggests within the scope of her relatively short adaptation, the richness of theme, the totality of conception and Joyce's epic death-in-life and life-in-death cycle of human existence. Nearly all the dramatic techniques of note are employed: the chorus of the ancient drama; the liturgy of the mass; the radio announcer of living newspaper drama; the fast, rowdy exchanges of vaudeville; the easy scenic shifts effected by a few props and costume changes of expressionist drama; and the use of gesture, object and character of symbolist drama.

In spite of all the difficulties, Joyce's language, as he himself proved by his reading from the novel, is meant to be heard. The drama is as much dependent upon the ear as upon the eye. The intricate pattern of puns, the singing, roaring and guffawing of Joyce's new language bewitch the ear even when the meaning is lost in a rush of rich sound. The language often appears to speak more to the subconscious than to the conscious mind—an expression of feeling more than an expression of idea. Any cutting of so vast and intricate a work is bound to provoke some charges of oversimplification and falsification. Given the obvious necessity to cut and cut drastically, nevertheless there are instances where Miss Manning unnecessarily sacrifices some of Joyce's brilliant effects. Joyce's comic effects are often Rabelaisian; his sentences roar to a blast of laughter; to cut such sentences is to diminish the roar and thus truncate the comic effect. Such sentences are made for the stage—witness Sir Epicure Mammon's long extravagant passages in *The Alchemist*. One such sentence appears in the tale of the Ondt and the Gracehoper. Joyce reads as follows:

He had eaten all the whilepaper, swallowed the lustres, devoured forty flights of styecarcases, chewed up all the mensas and seccles, ronged the records, made mundballs of the ephemerids and vorasiused most glutinously with the very timeplace in the ternitary . . .

Manning cuts it thus:

He had eaten all the whilepaper, swallowed the lustres, devoured forty flights of styecarcases . . .

But the characters of Shem and Shaun emerge graphically: Shaun, especially in the scene with the girls, Scene Five, suggests the burlesque comedian; Shem suggests Stephen Dedalus with an extravagant sense of humor.

The adaptation captures the basic tone and atmosphere of the novel: the sense that between the two extremes of birth and death lies the dream of life—sometimes fantastic, sometimes lyrical, but more often absurd.

HENRY F. SALERNO

